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Sea Swallow

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The Society was formed in 1947 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

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Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

I hope readers will enjoy this issue of *Sea Swallow*, the third in the new-look version. It once again aims to achieve a balance between serious articles of lasting value to the professional researcher and more general articles for the amateur observer. As Chairman, I am particularly taken by the article on the preservation of the Taiko Petrel (see page 4), for the RNBWS has helped to fund this very significant and successful project.

Last year I reported our intention to put past *Sea Swallows* on the website, with access open to all, and that task is now just about complete. Visitors to the website are now able to peruse at their leisure every issue almost to the present day. I say almost, for each new edition will be for members only until two years have passed, at which point it will be put on the website, and available to the rest of the world.

During the past year we have been busy thinking about the future direction for the RNBWS. We remain a small organisation, but we were amongst the first in the field and are still influential, largely on account of our large database of seabird records acquired over the years and our ability to reach parts of the oceans that others seldom can. We are now having a look at this database, to see how it can best be presented and accessed by researchers, and to see how we can link up with other guardians of seabird databases.

Another way in which we hope to maintain our influence is by taking part in major seabird events. One such this year was the 12th International Seabird Group Conference, reported on in more detail on page 93. A common thread underlying much of the research presented is the declining population numbers of seabirds. The current prognosis for many populations of albatrosses is particularly alarming, given their extremely slow life cycles and high levels of incidental mortality in marine fisheries. In addition, many albatrosses breed or feed in polar regions, where the rates of environmental changes are amongst the highest in the world. We will be working with organisations such as *BirdLife International* to address these issues.

It was good to see that Bill Bourne was at the Oxford conference. He is rightly fêted as one of the founders of The Seabird Group, an important and increasingly influential organisation. For us, it was a good start; we were able to share information, make some good contacts with the research community, host a display stall, and enjoy the whole scene. Next time - 2016 in Edinburgh - we plan to be there again, and perhaps have a bit more visibility.

Long serving members will note and regret the passing of Michael Gallagher, whose obituary is reported in these pages. Michael was a prime example of what members of the three service bird watching societies can contribute to ornithology and world conservation.

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Webmaster's Report

by CPO Mark Cutts

After several years of development the website is now finally as we would like it.

We still have a number of issues behind the scenes, mostly involving data manipulation, but we are hoping to have these resolved very soon. Generally the website does the job; it acts as a focal point for the society within the web community, and dispenses news about our activities whilst sharing seabird news in general. Most importantly, it is the shop window for our world database of seabird observations.

The RNBWS database has attracted interest throughout the year, with requests for permission to use the data for a number of worldwide projects. Over the years I have asked for assistance with purifying the data and I am glad to say that this year a number of members have stepped forward. Hopefully, this work will be finished during 2014 and we can concentrate on adding new information to the growing volume of records.

Another internet project is the RNBWS Flckr account. When first created the aim was to hold all of the society's best seabird and landbird at sea images in a single place, hoping in time to cover as many of the world's seabirds as possible. After a slow beginning the list of species has taken off as our antipodean cousin, Neil Cheshire, a prolific seabirder, has started to share his vast collection of images. However, there are still many areas of the globe yet to be covered, and members are invited to contact me and share their photos. Slides and printed images are welcome and will of course be returned to the owner. Images of yesteryear are especially welcome.

Our Twitter account is also well supported and followed by many notable societies and others with an interest in birds at sea.

Finally, among my other duties I also create and distribute the quarterly newsletter. Published in January, April, July and October. This is only as good as the articles that are contributed and I invite all members and readers to pass me seabird and landbird at sea news, information or images that they feel members of the society would enjoy. The newsletter is distributed in either Word or PDF format by e-mail. If readers would like to receive it then please pass me a current e-mail address.

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Plate 1. Taiko nest site with movement tracking device.

Successful translocation of petrels in the Chatham Islands

by Captain Stephen Chapman MN

(All photographs taken by the author)

A chance port of call by the barque *STS Lord Nelson* in the South Pacific to Chatham Island yielded first-hand experience of two exciting conservation projects, one of which the RNBWS is actively supporting. Embarked on this tall ship with a mission to take sailing opportunities for those with disabilities around the world, the leg from Napier, New Zealand to Cape Horn provided the opportunity to check up on a major conservation effort supported in a small way by the RNBWS.

At latitude 45° south and just to the west of the international dateline, the islands are the first to see the sunrise. In northern hemisphere terms they are located about opposite to Bordeaux. The Chatham Islands, discovered in 1791 by the survey vessel *HMS Chatham*, are an archipelago of 11 islands; only Chatham and Pitt are inhabited, with a population of less than 600. European settlement dates from the early 1800s with sealers, then whalers and farmers. For me the recent breeding discovery of the endemic Taiko, or Magenta Petrel *Pterodroma magenta*, known previously only from a bird shot at sea in 1867, plus the Chatham Petrel *Pterodroma axillaris* and the endemic Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche (c.) eremita* were good enough reasons to seize the opportunity and get ashore here for few hours.

It was one amazing day: transported by Joss Thomas, the Harbour Master, more than 15km over dirt roads and sheep pastures to meet Mike Bell the resident warden at the Sweetwater Reserve, a securely fenced conservation area. Here Taikos nest in peat burrows amongst fern bush. The five acre site is high up, securely fenced from predators such as cats, rats, possums, hedgehogs and the flightless Buff Weka *Gallirallus australis*; also from trample damage from feral cattle. In this area nest a very few of the estimated 100 breeding pairs of Taikos. Mike Bell tracks movements in and out of burrows and of prospecting birds with fitted radio positioning devices.

Climbing through the damp bush ducking under fallen trees and dodging ferns, we found clearly marked entrances to underground burrows. At some, occupation was evident from the heaps of freshly excavated soil. To cap the experience Mike lifted the lid on an artificial burrow to show a bird incubating. We felt very privileged to be viewing the dark brown plumage of one of the world's rarest seabirds and testament to the great efforts the locals have made to ensure their protection.

The story of Taiko conservation is a staggering one. Brought back from extinction when rediscovered by David Crockett in 1978, it took a further ten years to locate the breeding colonies in the rugged bush of the Tuku Valley. A secure, predator- free breeding site is the only real chance Taiko has of surviving long-term, and the Taiko Trust decided to take on the challenge.

It secured funding from the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and the Biodiversity Condition Fund to erect over 800 metres of predator-proof fence to protect an area of regenerating forest within the Sweetwater Conservation Covenant. Constructing the fence presented a major logistical challenge, but with hard work and dedication it was completed in 2006. Sweetwater was chosen because it was known to be a historical Taiko breeding site, and is a distinctive hill which provides birds with a good aerial display site. Predator control within the reserve continues to be vital to Taiko survival, and each year the Department of Conservation sends in teams of trappers to help protect the birds.

Plate 2. Joss and Mike.

Plate 3. Sweetwater enclosure.

Chick transfers and breeding burrow monitoring at Sweetwater

With a secure area for breeding in place, artificial burrows were dug into the ground and a sound system set up to play Taiko calls each evening. Between 2007 and 2011, the Trust transferred all known Taiko chicks from the Tuku Nature Reserve into the secure Sweetwater area before fledging. Mike Bell says that this concentration of breeding activity is vital to preserve the Taiko.

If needed, chicks were fed to ensure they maintained good weights, giving them the best possible chance of survival. Petrel chicks are highly site faithful, and always return to breed at the colony from which they fledged. This first 2007 cohort of chicks marked the beginning of the building up of a core population which can breed in a secure, predator-free location. Transfers were continued each year until 2011.

It is thought that Taiko chicks take from five to nine years to reach maturity before returning to their natal colony to breed. 2010 was an exciting year as it marked the first return of a chick moved to and fledged from Sweetwater in 2007. This was followed in 2011 with the return of an additional chick. In 2012, there were 12 return chicks at Sweetwater, including the first sighting of a 2009 cohort bird. Meanwhile, over the course of five summers, 57 chicks were transferred from the reserve into Sweetwater, the greatest number of Taiko chicks that have ever been found. With the return of 12–15 chicks, this marks a survival rate of the first two cohorts of chick transfers at about 60%, significantly higher than the natural recruitment rate of 20–30%[i]. This is a major accomplishment, and demonstrates huge progress and success in Taiko conservation. The year 2013 was a particularly exciting one, for it was the first season that breeding began at Sweetwater. Two eggs were laid, marking the success of much dedication and hard work over the past decade.

A low impact hands-off method is used to monitor burrows at Sweetwater. This is to avoid disturbing any birds settling into burrows. Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) readers and hidden cameras help to identify any birds visiting the colony.

The PIT readers funded by a grant by the RNBWS have been vital in monitoring movements at the breeding burrows, and also in helping to identify what other birds are back. "Without these readers, we would have no idea what is going on in Sweetwater", recounts Mike Bell. "This year they have helped us identify the two breeding burrows, and also told us that there are three other pairs forming in burrows, one of which looks very promising for breeding next season (2014–15). In addition there are also a further seven burrows which have males back, busy digging and displaying for mates".

"Without these readers we would certainly not have this level of knowledge. As the number of breeding birds increases however, we need more readers, as it is vital to have readers on all breeding burrows. At present we have to move the few we have from burrow to burrow to find out what is going on. So we desperately need more readers to be able to keep a track on burrows, for over the next few years we should continue to have an increase in the number of Taiko returning as the younger cohorts of chicks start returning".

"It really has enabled us to keep tabs on the birds, to determine the success of the transfer and track both pre-breeding and breeding behaviour. We have learnt that 70% of chicks have returned from the first two years of transfer, an amazing figure. It has also helped to follow the progress of the two first chicks, making sure parents are returning to feed them, and that they are developing OK".

"Now, finally - the first birds have started breeding at Sweetwater! Not one but two pairs have laid an egg each, marking 2013 as a year that will go down in history. This is huge news for Taiko conservation, and all the hard work and dedication from countless volunteers, the Taiko Trust, and the Chatham Islands have paid off".

Plate 4. Taiko in nest burrow.

Plate 5. Hilltop site of Sweetwater reserve.

Search history for breeding birds and burrows at the Tuku Reserve

David Crockett, of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, visited the Chathams for the first time in 1969, developed an interest in the Taiko and started searching for the birds in 1972. Birds were seen flying around at night in 1973, but none were caught until 1 January 1978, the day that marks the official Taiko rediscovery. Caught birds at light-attraction stations were fitted with transmitters; of the 52 captured 71% were males, and all 36 that were tracked successfully proved to be non-breeders in the breeding season of capture. The data indicated no sex bias in their probability of being captured at lights. The birds were tagged with radio transmitters, ultimately leading Crockett and his team to discover the first breeding burrows in 1987/88[ii].

David Crockett's expeditions in the 1970s are the roots of the present Chatham Island Taiko Trust. Expeditions continue to be conducted to search for Taiko breeding sites in the Tuku Nature Reserve. Each night, bright spotlights are operated to catch birds as they return from the sea to their breeding burrows. Any caught birds are fitted with radio transmitters and tracked to find the location of the burrow. This helped increase the number of known breeding burrows in the Reserve to 17 by 2009. Expeditions help determine the longevity and population dynamics of this exceptionally rare seabird.

The discovery of the breeding areas has been important in protecting breeding Taiko and increasing productivity. Additionally, genetic analyses of birds caught at the Tuku light site often reveal new individuals, thereby suggesting that there are undiscovered breeding burrow groups somewhere in the dense bush of the South Chathams.

Chatham Petrels translocated

The Chatham Petrel is another endangered species, with a total population of only about 1000 birds. Rangatira is its main island stronghold and in the years 2002–04 birds were moved from there to establish a new breeding population on Pitt Island. Supported entirely by voluntary contributions and charitable funding, this was a big step to redress the harm done by shipwrecks, colonisation and the introduction of predators to island communities.

The second new site for the Chatham Petrel was Sweetwater. In 2008 47 Chatham Petrel chicks were transferred from Rangatira, and between 2008 and 2011 a further 200, with the first birds found breeding in 2012 and two new chicks present in 2013. Returning this species to Chatham has been a huge success.

Chicks are thought to remain out at sea for the first three to four years of their life before returning to land to breed. Like most seabirds, Chatham Petrel chicks are highly faithful to the site from which they fledge, so chicks from Sweetwater should return to this site to breed. This is the highest number of petrel chicks recorded on Chatham Island since their extirpation over 500 years ago and marks a major accomplishment in the conservation history of this species[iii].

Plate 6. STS Lord Nelson sails for Cape Horn.

Departure

After contrary winds and a bouncy crossing from Napier to Chatham, it was a pleasure to hear Skylarks singing over the sheep pastures and see local harriers, pigeons and fantails. We were now fully refreshed and enthused, in readiness for our 4,700 mile voyage to Cape Horn. Mike said we could expect to see seven types of albatross in these waters and we would also have a chance to see the both of the petrels in their ocean environment. As the light faded the wind started to freshen, and ***Lord Nelson*** moved off the quay to anchor for the night in Waitangi Bay before setting sail next morning, on 29 December 2013.

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[i] www.taiko.org.nz/trust_projects.html
[ii] Imber, M.J. *et al.*, 2005. Ibis 147: 758–763
[iii] www.taiko.org.nz/trust_projects.html

Plate 7. Debris at Hewison Point.

Demolished Argentine base, Thule Island, South Sandwich Islands; re-colonisation by Adelie and Chinstrap Penguin

by Warrant Officer Tony Tindale, *HMS Protector*

(All photographs taken by the author)

Southern Thule in the South Sandwich Islands is comprised of three islands. The two largest, Thule and Cook Islands, are the remains of the rim of an extinct volcano. Thule Island represents the western side of the rim, Cook Island the eastern side and Douglas Strait the flooded caldera. In 1976 the Argentines, without the approval of the British Government, built the 'Corbeta Uruguay' Station on Thule Island at Hewison Point. Initially the British Government sought a diplomatic solution to this provocative action but in 1982, after the end of the Falklands Conflict, a small Task Group was sent to remove the Argentine contingent from the island. The Argentine personnel surrendered to the Task Group, comprised of the frigate *HMS Yarmouth*, the ice patrol ship *HMS Endurance* and *RFA Olmeda*, without a fight[1]. However, later that year the survey ship *HMS Hecate* reported that the Argentine flag was still flying there and the British Government ordered the complete destruction of the station. The demolition was carried out by a detachment of Royal Marines from the frigate *HMS Ariadne* and *RFA Tidespring* in early 1983, and from a military perspective the operation was a complete success. However, the debris that remained was both unsightly and environmentally damaging.

Hewison Point was a known breeding site for Chinstrap and Adelie Penguins (a previous *HMS Protector* had reported it fifty years earlier), and although the demolition of the station in 1983 obviously had an adverse effect on the penguins they have since reclaimed the site with thousands now nesting within the ruins. While the environmental impact on wildlife from the debris that litters the area seems to be small there is concern about potential pollution, entanglement from discarded wire and injury from sharp objects.

On 2 January 2014 *HMS Protector* entered Douglas Strait and held station off Hewison Point, tasked with conducting a survey of the demolished Argentine base and making proposals for a clean-up of the site. The three options under consideration were the removal of loose debris only, removal of loose and larger debris (to include some demolition) and total removal (except foundations).

The following day I was one of five members of the ship's company landed to conduct the survey, and I had responsibility for recording the wildlife present and for providing engineering expertise. In addition, the ship's divers conducted a dive just offshore to search for evidence of the equipment the Argentineans had thrown into the sea before they surrendered. It was a truly memorable day for me and provided me with my first close encounter with Adelie and Chinstrap Penguins.

The survey of the site involved walking through the centre of the complex, which was largely free of birds. Mangled structures and surrounding debris were photographed, and the GPS position of key features recorded. Along the rocky coastline we had to make do with estimates, for the rocks were full of occupied nests, and we didn't want to cause unnecessary disturbance.

As we methodically recorded the ruins I kept an eye out for any evidence that the debris had had any adverse affect on the penguin colony, particularly from the collection of glass fragments for nest construction. From the numerous empty aluminium square window frames that littered the site there must have been a significant amount of broken glass strewn across the area after the detonations of the explosive charges. However, I inspected many of the nests at the periphery of the colony and I didn't see any fragments of glass or any other man made material in their construction, although everything was smothered in guano. I did encounter two injured penguins but it was impossible to determine the cause of the injuries.

Plate 8. Debris at Hewison Point.

Plates 9–12. Top left and right: Debris at Hewison Point. **Bottom left:** Adelie Penguin. **Bottom right:** Incubating Gentoo Penguin.

Chinstrap Penguins dominated at the western end of the colony and I was surprised just how far up the adjacent steep hillside they were nesting. It would be a serious trek back and forth to the sea for individuals nesting so high up. Further east the Adelie Penguin became more predominant. However, there didn't appear to be sufficient bare rock available for the number of breeding pairs present. Consequently some nests on the periphery of the colony had been built on the ice, and at least a dozen birds were incubating eggs on ice where there was no evidence of a nest at all.

Although Adelie and Chinstrap Penguin numbers are counted in tens of thousands there were also smaller numbers of Gentoos present within the colony, and these birds in particular utilised the coiled hoses and empty window frames as nest sites.

References

[1]**Hart, T., Black, A. and White, R. 2011.** *South Sandwich Islands Environmental Clean-up - Corbeta Uruguay Station*.

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Plate 13. Juan Fernandez Petrel, South East Pacific, 15 Apr 2014. © *Steve Copsey*

Easter Island to Punta Arenas

by Peter Fraser

Peter Fraser has been an RNBWS member for many years. Two birding projects dominated his early adult years, the use of IT (this in 1983!) to gather records of rare birds in Great Britain, and then actual participation in Britain's Scarce Migrant Project.

He has been statistician and secretary of the British Birds Rarities Committee, authoring both Rare Bird and Scarce Migrant reports in British Birds and is co-author of Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland and Rare Birds Day by Day, both published by T. & A.D. Poyser.

Since 1998 he has lived in Cornwall and his birding is divided between looking at migration at Cape Cornwall Golf Club and seabirding on expedition cruise voyages. Over the years he has contributed a large number of seabird records to the RNBWS database.

Introduction

The southeast subtropical and temperate parts of the Pacific Ocean are probably the least visited seas anywhere on earth. Commercial shipping is negligible and cruise ships rarely sail south of a line between Valparaiso and Easter Island, while yachts are usually too busy pretending to circumnavigate the globe by whizzing around Antarctica to venture much north of 55° south in the Pacific.

In November 2005, I joined a trip organised by John Brodie Good, of Wildwings in Bristol, UK, sailing southward, against the Humboldt Current, from Callao, Peru, to Ushuaia, Argentina, on *MV Polar Star*. We were hoping to see all three of the *Pterodroma* petrel species breeding endemically on the Juan Fernandez Islands. However, we saw only Defilppi's *P. deflippiana*, mostly in waters just north of Valparaiso, Chile. This sparked much discussion among the group as to the breeding season foraging ranges of the other two species: Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris* and Juan Fernandez Petrel *P. externa.*

So, in December 2013, I spent 8 days on the Hapag-Lloyd expedition cruise ship *MV Hanseatic* on a repositioning voyage from Easter Island to Punta Arenas, Chile.

There were two main reasons for taking the trip; the possibility of achieving a first sighting of a Stejneger's Petrel, and to try and to assess bird densities in this part of the Pacific Ocean.

Course and survey details

The ship left Easter Island at 12:30 on 10 December, 2013, and headed south east at 16 knots, reaching the Chilean Fjords at Golfo Trinidad at dawn on 16 December, a track that followed the submarine Chile Rise. The rest of the voyage took us through the Canal Sarpiento and the Estrecho Collingwood into the Straits of Magellan before docking at Punta Arenas on the 17th.

In order to try and survey bird densities at sea I decided to make 10 minutes counts of all birds seen for'ard of the beam during the pelagic section of the voyage, following established protocols, e.g. Tasker *et al.*, 1984. As to the most suitable width for the survey, I thought half a kilometre from the ship would be sensible, but I soon realised that this would result in most individuals of the commonest bird, Juan Fernandez Petrel *P. externa (*JFPE), not being counted. I have had experience of good numbers of this species before, to the south of Hawaii in 2008 and between Ducie I., Pitcairn, and Easter I. in 2010. At best it would be fair to describe their habits as 'boat-indifferent' and at worst 'boat-shy'. So I decided to double the width of the section to 1km on each side of the bow.

Table 1, below, gives the midday position and the day's survey duration.

Table 1. Details of Ship's progress.
*Distances are shown either from Easter I. ("out") or to the mouth of Golfo Trinidad, Chile ("to go"), at midday, ship's time.

DATE	LAT/LONG	APPROX. DISTANCE*	SURVEY DURATION (HRS)
December 10th	27°04.0′ w 109°19.5′ s	At anchor off Easter Is	05:50
December 11th	31°00.6′ w 104°19.4′ s	350 nm out	11:40
December 12th	35°12.7′ w 98°29.3′ s	720 nm out	10:30
December 13th	38°54.1′ w 93°15.5′ s	1000 nm to go	08:30
December 14th	43°07.5′ w 86°56.9′ s	620 nm to go	09:30
December 15th	47°05.3′ w 80°35.3′ s	265 nm to go	10:00

Observations

Table 2 shows the totals of pelagic species seen on the trip.

Table 2. Gross seabird totals from Easter Island to Golfo Trinidad, Chile. The first total is of birds seen under survey conditions; the second total includes all birds seen.

Species	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th
'Wandering' Albatross *Diomedea exulans*	-	-	-	-	-		
Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sandfordi*	-	-	-	-	1 : 1	-	-
Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*	-	1 : 1	1 : 1	1 : 1	-	-	0 : 350
Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*	-	-	-	-	-	3 : 3	-
Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*	-	-	-	-	1 : 1	2 : 2	-
Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*	-	-	-	-	-	1 : 1	0 : 30
Antarctic Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialoides*	-	-	-	-	-	-	0 : 500
Prion sp *Pachyptila sp (prob desolata)*	-	-	-	-	-	1 : 1	-
Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*	1 : 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
'Cookilaria' sp *Pterodroma sp.*	-	1 : 1	1 : 1	1 : 1	-	-	-
Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris*	-	-	-	-	-	6 : 6	-
Juan Fernandez Petrel *Pterodroma externa*	13 : 13	23 : 23	28 : 29	204 : 209	54 : 59	13 : 13	-
Murphy's Petrel *Pterodroma ultima*	1 : 1	3 : 3	-	-	-	-	-
Larger Petrel (dark underwing) *Pterodroma sp*	1 : 1						
Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*	-	-	-	-	1 : 1	4 : 6	-
Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*	-	-	-	2 : 2		26 : 26	0 : 25
Christmas Shearwater *Puffinus nativitatis*	1 : 1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*	-	-	-	-	-	-	0 : 1000
Magellanic Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides magellani*	-	-	-	-	-	-	0 : 50
Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*	-	1 : 1	-	-	-	-	-
Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*	0 : 10						
Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*	-	-	-	-	82 : 82	10 : 10	
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*	-	-	3 : 3	18 : 18	-	-	-

Plate 14. Juan Fernandez Petrel, South East Pacific, 15 Apr 2014. © *Steve Copsey*

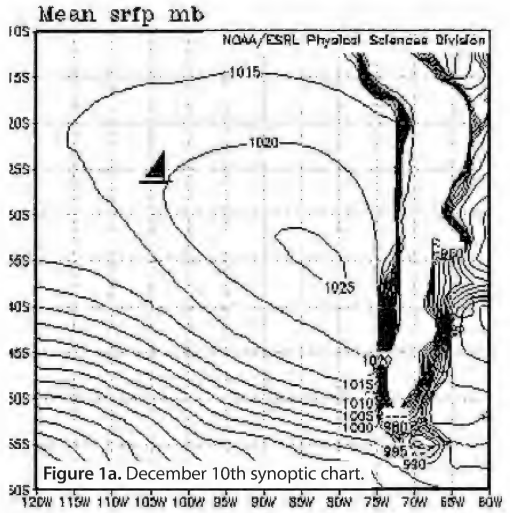


Figure 1a. December 10th synoptic chart.

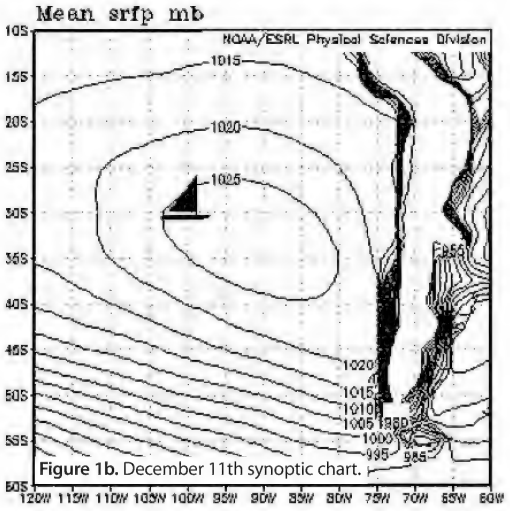


Figure 1b. December 11th synoptic chart.

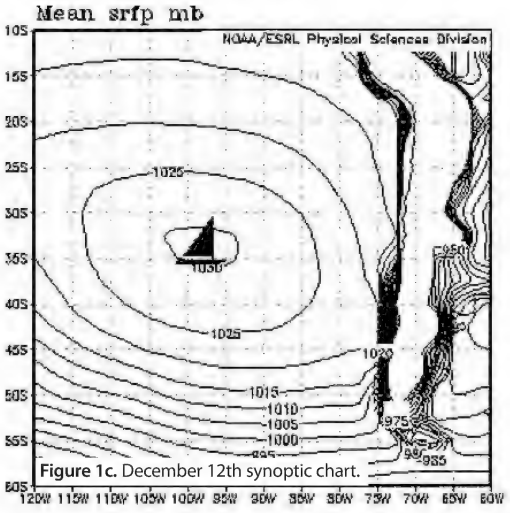


Figure 1c. December 12th synoptic chart.

Daily diary of weather and bird movements

Each day describes the weather and seabird sightings linked with a surface pressure chart (derived from NOAA data http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/psd/cgi-bin) also showing the approximate position of the ship at midday.

December 10th: We departed Easter Island under bright skies and a north-easterly breeze (c. force 3). There were no obvious movements amongst the 13 JFPE seen. The Black-winged Petrel was 500 m ahead of the bow and moved off southeast ahead of the ship. In contrast the Murphy's Petrel appeared right on the bow and then headed northwest; the Christmas Shearwater did the same.

December 11th: Dawn saw an increase in the breeze, which had backed slightly to the north. 15 of the 23 JFPE were seen before 09:10, mostly foraging or drifting south-eastwards. A small *Pterodroma* with a pale-head and pale underwings ran distantly ahead of the ship at 09:10. The wind subsided during the morning as we entered the centre of the southeast Pacific high pressure system. There was a notable amount of floating garbage in the centre of this gyre. The only bird between 09:10 and 16:00 was another Murphy's Petrel heading north west at 10 am. The afternoon saw two more Murphy's heading north west, and a Black-browed Albatross heading south west. The day's remaining JFPE headed south, and the last bird of the day was a Red-tailed Tropicbird flushed off the sea.

December 12th: It was still quiet with a light ENE breeze at dawn with around a dozen JFPE foraging in the early hours, and the last at 10:00. In the afternoon a south-easterly breeze picked up (indicating we had moved to the east of the centre of the high). The JFPE from 17:00 until 20:00 were now moving east or south east.

December 13th: There was a light south-westerly breeze at dawn, the skies were grey and the air damp. Nevertheless the sea temperature was still 18°C. There was a continual stream of JFPE throughout the day, almost all heading southeast. It was sunny from 11:00 but the weather deteriorated during the afternoon, with cold fog from 15:30. Surveying was abandoned at 17:00. The peak of JFPE movement was in the hour after the sun came out, with 17 during one 10 minute period, and 52 between 11:30 and 12:30. All were headed south east at considerable speed; at least twice the ship's speed, and maybe more, so possibly at 40 knots. At 12:40 I saw a small *Pterodroma* petrel which I could not identify at the time. Several small groups of Arctic Skua were also seen on this day.

December 14th: A day of moderate southwest to westerly winds, misty with occasional rain, 15° C. There were still good numbers of JFPE, but much fewer than on the 13th. Almost all were flying northeast, slightly across the bow from starboard. At midday we were 500 nautical miles due west of the Golfo de Penas, Chile. Apart from the JFPEs, the most significant birds present were Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Some of the crew pointed out birds that I missed, as they flew as high, if not higher than the bridge, while I stared at the waves. The day also saw the first Westland Petrel and a Northern Royal Albatross headed northeast.

December 15th: A cold (11°C.), grey day with a moderate to strong north-westerly wind directly astern. By 7:30 several 'early' stage Wandering-type Albatross were in the ship's wake with two Westland Petrels while three Grey-headed Albatrosses passed southwest. JFPEs were now few in number, but, remarkably, those present were flying south. To my amazement so were some small *Pterodromas*. These were Stejneger's! Four approached the ship from the northeast but eluded the camcorder as they frustratingly disappeared in a trough. All the day's

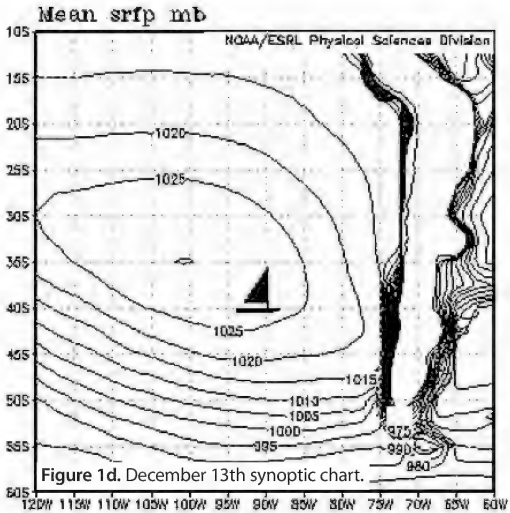


Figure 1d. December 13th synoptic chart.

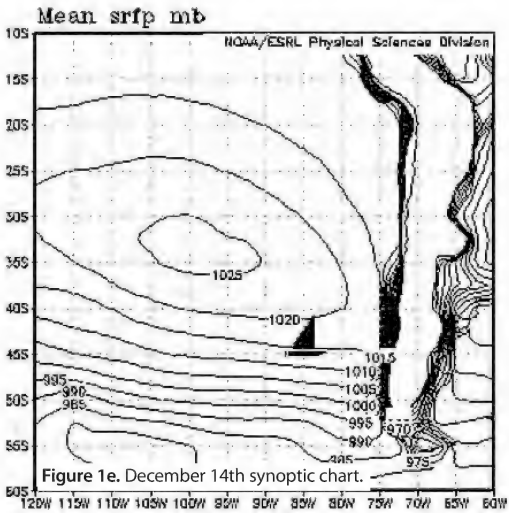


Figure 1e. December 14th synoptic chart.

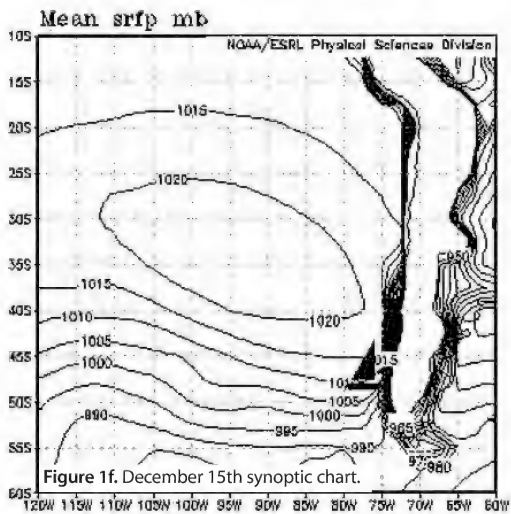


Figure 1f. December 15th synoptic chart.

Plate 15. Sooty Shearwater, South Atlantic, 18 Dec 2012. © *Steve Copsey*

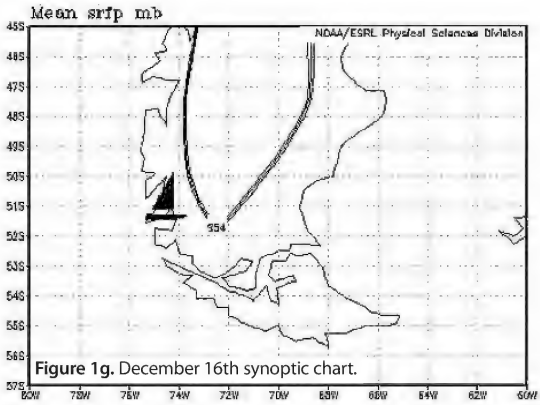


Figure 1g. December 16th synoptic chart.

Sooty Shearwaters headed southwest. At 10:40 there was a huge whale blow to the north (a Blue Whale?) and at midday I picked up a Sperm Whale heading just southward of the ship's hearing. A Buller's Albatross flew past the ship towards it. The last JFPE flew southwest at 14:20. At 16:00, in the middle of a small passage of Sooty Shearwaters and just after a Prion on the bow, another two Stejneger's appeared from the northeast. This time the birds flew directly across the bow, to the southwest with the Sooties and gave superb views. The last birds of the day were a Westland Petrel and a Grey-headed Albatross, definitely more southern ocean than subtropical Pacific!

December 16th: At dawn we were at the entrance of the Golfo Trinidad, with typical weather for the latitude, windy, cold and grey. Several Southern Giant Petrels were following the ship and there were large flocks of 'Fuegian' Wilson's Petrels *O. o. chilensis* and distant Magellanic Diving Petrels. As we entered the Canal Sarpiento, there were large numbers of Black-browed Albatross, many Giant Petrels, several almost flightless in moult. Further on large flocks of Southern Fulmars were disturbed by the ship, and an Andean Condor flew over the wreck of the American freighter at Paso shoals.

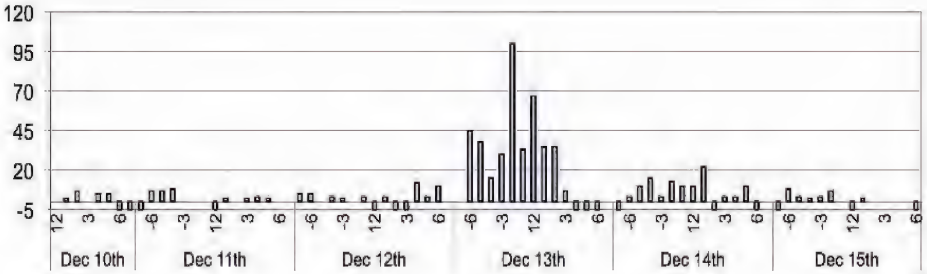
Plate 16. Black-winged Petrel, Central Eastern Pacific, 17 Apr 2014. © *Steve Copsey*

Analysis

Density of Juan Fernandez Petrels

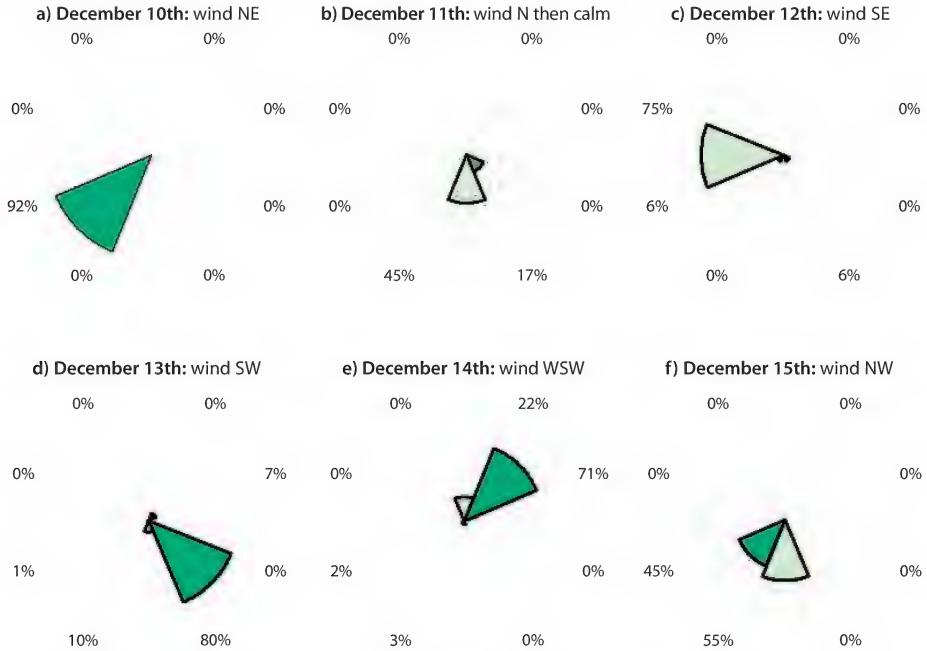
As a reasonable approximation, an area of 60 km^2 was surveyed in one hour - given the ship's speed of just over 15 knots and a strip width of 2 km. Figure 2 gives these hourly totals expressed as the number of birds per 100 km^2.

Figure 2. Number of JFPE stated as birds per 100 km^2 in each hour of survey from Easter Island to approximately 170 nm west of Golfo Trinidad, Chile, during December 2013. A negative figure indicates that no surveying was carried out at that time.



Flight Direction of Juan Fernandez Petrels

Figure 3a–f. Direction of flight of JFPE each day. The radius of each segment corresponds to the percentage of the total number of individuals seen that day. Remaining percentages are accounted for by birds flying in no overall direction; these are assumed to be foraging. The day's prevailing wind is shown at the top of each chart.



It can be seen that birds rarely, if ever, flew upwind, and that, on the first three days, birds flew almost precisely downwind. Between December 13th and 15th flight was more across the wind. On December 13th, with the wind in the southwest, of 204 birds seen during survey periods, 184 flew between south and southeast.

Discussion

After the 2005 voyage (see the introduction), I had surmised that JFPE and Stejneger's Petrels might forage far into the southeast Pacific to the west of the Juan Fernandez Islands. Adams (2009) showed that movements of two Pterodroma species (Hawaiian Petrel *P. sandwichensis* and Grey-faced Petrel *P. (macroptera) gouldi*) followed "mega-scale meteorological phenomena, including Pacific Basin anticyclones". These two species flew downwind (with a quartering tailwind) around anticyclones, Grey-faced Petrel in the southwest Pacific and Hawaiian Petrel in the north Pacific.

So the sightings of JFPE were consistent with the notion that they may forage in an anti-clockwise fashion around the southeast Pacific high pressure system. In all, 346 JFPE were seen. 209 (60%) were seen on one day, December 13th. This was the day when the ship met the prevailing westerlies to the southeast of the high-pressure centre. It seems quite probably that the ship was crossing the Subtropical Front at this point (Tomczak and Godfrey, 2003). On December 14th 52 out of 54 JFPE surveyed flew to the north or northeast on a west-south-westerly wind. This direction would take them back to the Juan Fernandez Islands.

Plate 17. Southern Giant Petrel, Goose Green, 3 Apr 2011. © *Steve Copsey*

Plate 18. Wilson's Storm-petrel, Mid-Atlantic, 18th June 2010. © *Mark Cutts*

The same cannot be said of Stejneger's Petrel. After four and a half days on deck I had only seen three Cookilaria-type petrels. With hindsight, it was conceivable that the bird on the 13th might have been a Stejneger's, but the viewing was too brief and distant - especially for a 'new' bird. By the 14th I had written off seeing any, as the hypothesis (and published distribution maps) indicated they didn't range to the southwest of the Juan Fernandez Islands. By December 15th the weather had turned decidedly temperate and there was a distinctly Antarctic feel to the day's avifauna (see table 2). The first mate showed me one of the ship's charts indicating that we were quite possibly under the influence of the Subantarctic Front, which may be substantially displaced to the north in the austral summer.

So I was surprised to start seeing Stejneger's Petrels flying southwest, along with the other tubenoses - mostly Sooty Shearwaters and a few JFPE. All these birds were flying at 90° to the wind and all the circumstances point to their flying down to the Subantarctic Front, presumably to forage.

Brooke suggests that egg laying in Stejneger's Petrel may not occur until late December or January. So the middle of December would coincide with the pre-egg laying exodus from the colony. Photographs in Howell (2012) of Stejneger's Petrel were taken in Aisen province, Chile, i.e. between 45° and 50° south, in February. So it may well be that this species is a cold water feeder which may range down to the Subantarctic to feed.

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Plate 19. Northern Rockhopper Penguin, Diamond Cove. © *Alan Henry*

Northern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes moseleyi* sightings on the Falkland Islands

by CPO Mark Cutts

The Rockhopper Penguin was split by Birdlife International in 2006 after several papers that distinguished two separate species, both genetically and morphologically (Jouventin *et al.* 2006, Banks *et al.* 2006). From this we now have the Northern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes moselei*, which breeds in the Tristan de Cunha group and the Southern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* which breed in the Falkland Islands and on islands off Southern Patagonia. There is also the Eastern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome filholi,* which breeds on sub-Antarctic islands of the Indo-pacific Ocean, proposed as a separate species but yet to be accepted by most official bodies.

There has been some debate, mostly over the internet, about the correct common name that should be given to the Northern species, with suggestions such as Tristan (the island group), Long-plumed (descriptive) or Moseley's (as per the scientific name). However, at present most authorities are still using Northern Rockhopper Penguin.

In November 2009 during the regular Falklands Conservation Penguin count, a Northern Rockhopper Penguin was discovered at a small Southern Rockhopper colony on the edge of Berkeley Sound in an area known as Diamond Cove. Shortly afterwards on the 26th Alan Henry, Mike Morrison and two others took a launch and an inflatable to this rarely visited area and immediately spotted the bird. This individual has been recorded at the same colony every year since then, usually within a few feet of the original spot.

On 5 January 2014, Alan Henry, Squadron Leader Nick Smith and I set off north to check the Diamond Cove area and to visit the other Southern Rockhopper Penguin colonies nearby at Rugged Hill and Eagle Point.

Arriving at Diamond Cove at around nine in the morning, we took the short walk to the cliff edge and could see over 150 adults plus another 150 well grown juveniles. Unfortunately and to Alan's dismay there was no sign of the Northern bird.

It was decided that we would next visit the other colonies and see if we could count the amount of chicks present, whilst looking out for Macaroni and 'Mackhopper' Penguin,(Macaroni/Southern Rockhopper hybrids), both of which had been seen there in the past.

After visits to six different penguin colonies we returned to Diamond Cove at around 15:00. The wind had increased substantially from the west and as we gingerly stepped down through the rocks we were delighted to find that a Northern individual was now present.

We could immediately see the physical differences between the two species;

- The supercilium of the Northern is thicker, leading into heavier and longer plumes extending below the demarcation line of the neck
- The black crest feathers appear to be longer overall, especially those adjacent to the extended supercilium

Obviously observers commenting on sightings of this bird have to rule out other species or variants. Both hybrid Rockhopper/Macaroni hybrids and the Eastern Rockhopper Penguin show bare skin, known as the gape, at the base of the bill and different coloration and arrangement of plumes on the sides of the head.

As far as I can ascertain there have been four other sightings of Northern Rockhopper Penguins on the Falkland Islands. The first was located by Mike Morrison in a rockhopper colony at MacBride Head on East Falkland on 24

Plate 20. Northern Rockhopper Penguin, Rugged Hill. © *M Cutts*

Plate 21. Northern Rockhopper Penguin. © *A Henry*

September 1995 and was still present on 31 December. The bird returned the next season and was seen again on 30 November 1996. In November 2004 one was recorded on New Island by Rafael Matias. Later that year, on 12 December 2004, an adult was found by Mark Pearman *et al.* on Kidney Island close to a pair of Macaroni Penguins, and although it was observed at some distance it was later confidently identified using photographic evidence. Finally one was reported by Klemens Putz on Beauchêne Island on 27 November 2011.

At present there are no records, including the individual at Diamond Cove, that have shown any proof of mating or hybridisation. There is of course a good chance that this species may have been overlooked on the islands in the past, and young birds or birds in moult may not show the classic extended yellow plumes diagnostic of the adults.

What we do know is that this species has shown a high degree of vagrancy, occurring in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and both Christmas and Kerguelen Islands. Strangely there are no records from the South American mainland or nearby islands.

Finally in mid January, whilst on a pelagic trip from Stanley in search of albatrosses, a conversation developed between Nick Smith, Sergeant Steve Kelly and myself with reference to a strange looking penguin that Steve had seen the week before during a visit to a colony at Murrel Farm, on the southern edge of Berkeley Sound. He had photographed the bird and on sighting the image we both agreed that this was indeed another Northern Rockhopper Penguin. This was later confirmed by Alan Henry. Furthermore Steve Kelly insisted that the bird was seated alongside an egg, This individual and site require further investigation, but unfortunately I was unable to do so before the completion of my tour.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Alan Henry for his help - he has a vast knowledge and experience of the birds of the Falkland Islands; to Nick Smith for his company and enthusiasm during our many birding exploits; and to Robin Woods for supplying the information on past records.

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Plates 22–23. Female house sparrow in 1989 roosting close to the old Marine Barracks in Georgetown on Ascension Island. © *K. Simmons* **(Inset)** West-facing side of the old Marine Barracks in Georgetown on Ascension Island where house sparrows roosted in nearby trees and nested in the roof of the lower passageway. © *D. Osborn*

The story of the Georgetown Sparrows: the introduction and extirpation of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* on Ascension Island

by B. John Hughes and S. James Reynolds

In the 19th century house sparrows *Passer domesticus* were exported from Great Britain to many parts of the world including the Americas and Australasia where they are now regarded as an invasive pest and the populations are controlled (Anderson 2006). The species has a large range (35 million km^2, del Hoyo *et al.* 2009) and a global population of more than half a billion birds (BirdLife International 2014). It is also found on some of UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) in the South Atlantic. Twenty six house sparrows from London were introduced to St Helena in 1869; the population never grew and was lost by the end of the century (Rowlands *et al.* 1998). On the Falkland Islands, however, the house sparrow population has flourished. Following the arrival of some 20 house sparrows in Port Stanley in 1919 on whaling ships from South America (Summers-Smith 2010) the population has increased to about1,000 pairs today (Bingham 2014).

Early in 1984 a male House Sparrow, an apparent ship stowaway, appeared in Georgetown on Ascension Island close to where ships unload and passengers disembark. Its arrival was significant as it increased the number of invasive landbird species on the island to three. Landbirds were deliberately introduced to Ascension Island in the 19th century but only four species (Red-necked Francolins *Francolinus afer, Y*ellow Canaries *Serinus flaviventris*, Common Waxbills *Estrilda astrild* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*) survived into the 21st century (Hughes 2014).

The 1984 House Sparrow was adopted by the Harris family (contract workers living in Georgetown) who cared for the bird. On 12th November 1985 they released five additional house sparrows (two males and three females) imported from Scotland. This event was recorded by a member of the Army Ornithological Society (AOS) who was on the island at the time with the Royal Air Force Sub-aqua Association.

Here, we report on the fate of the ship stowaway and of the five released sparrows on Ascension Island (07° 57′ S, 14° 24′ W, 97km²). Ascension is one of the volcanic islands that make up the UKOT of St Helena and is isolated in the tropical South Atlantic Ocean midway between South America and Africa. The island is an Important Bird Area (Sanders 2006).

The House Sparrow is a non-migratory species that lives in close proximity to man where it feeds on seeds and scraps (Summers-Smith 2010). Its typical lifespan is three years and it first breeds at one year of age. Population size can rapidly expand as their clutch size is 4–5 eggs and it attempts to breed two to three times in a given breeding season (Anderson 2006).

Distribution surveys and population censuses of landbirds on Ascension Island were carried out by the Army Ornithological Society (AOS), members of which have visited the island more than 20 times between 1982 and 2013. Surveys were completed by counting birds in 1-km grid squares (Varley & Dickey 1994). In 1994 direct counts of individual birds including both first-years and juveniles seen or heard in each grid square were recorded by two observers working together (Bibby *et al.* 2000). Additional house sparrow data were obtained from a search of field records collected on Ascension Island.

During the study period house sparrows were only recorded in Georgetown and their range size was approximately 2 km². Birds roosted close to the old Marine Barracks in the centre of Georgetown where they nested in holes in the roof of the lower passageway on the west side of the building. In 1990 and 1992 house sparrows were seen by the AOS team in Georgetown but their numbers were not recorded. In April 1994 seven males and five females were counted near their nests in the old Marine Barracks. In 1996 house sparrows were seen again but their numbers were not recorded. Systematic searches in Georgetown were conducted in 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004 when old nests were found but no birds were recorded and none has been observed since.

On Ascension Island the population sizes of common mynas and common waxbills have increased since their introduction (Hughes 2014) and this may be due to multiple introductions and the large founder populations (three introductions and more than 50 pairs of common mynas, Hart-Davis 1972) as well as successful breeding. We observed that between 1985 and 1994 the size of the house sparrow population had doubled but we found no evidence of multiple introductions and concluded that this increase was most likely due to successful breeding during the early stage of their invasion. These findings are supported by Simmons (1993) who reported a female house sparrow

feeding a fledgling and who estimated the total population size to be 15. In a succession of reports the house sparrow population was estimated to contain two juveniles and roughly "one dozen" adults in 1995 (Bell & Ashmole 1995), 20 adults in 1997 (Brooke & Jackson 1997), three males and one female in a population of seven to eight birds in the same year (K. Simmons pers. comm.).

House sparrows have successfully invaded many parts of the world. However, despite regular searches by the AOS between 2000 and 2013, and reports by the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department in 2002 (White *et al.* 2002) and Bell and Boyle (2004), no House Sparrows have been recorded on Ascension Island since 1997. House Sparrows do not migrate and as Ascension Island is isolated, it can be assumed that notwithstanding some initial breeding success the founder population was not sufficient to survive and the species died out in either 1998 or 1999.

Acknowledgements

We thank more than 50 members of the Army Ornithological Society for contributing to fieldwork on Ascension Island. In particular we would like to thank H. Nash for the sparrow introduction record, M. Varley and R. Dickey for the 1994 landbird census and K. Simmons for his landbird records. This research was privately funded by expedition members.

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Plate 24. Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, adult. Tristan da Cunha 14 April 2011.

Albatrosses of the Southern Atlantic Ocean

by Otto Plantema
(All photographs taken by the author)

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The albatrosses Diomedeidae are currently divided into four genera, the 'great albatrosses' *Diomedea*, the mollymawks *Thalassarche*, the 'sooty albatrosses' *Phoebetria* and the Pacific albatrosses *Phoebastria*, totalling 21 species (Robertson & Nunn 1998, Onley & Scofield 2007, cf Plantema 2011). Seven of these albatross species breed on islands in the Southern Atlantic Ocean. Tristan Albatross *D dabbenena* and Antlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *T chlororhynchos* breed exclusively on Tristan da Cunha and on Gough. The other five, Snowy *D exulans*, Grey-headed *T chrysostoma*, Black-browed *T melanophris*, Light-mantled *P palpebrata* and Sooty Albatross *P fusca*, breed circumpolar, with colonies on the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha and Gough. On five trips between 1979 and 2011 I had the opportunity to observe these albatrosses around their breeding colonies and a selection of photographs of the seven species is presented here; more photographs can be viewed at www.pbase.com/otto1/ant__albatros_alfab.

A decline in the breeding population of all albatross species is a general trend, mainly because of widespread non-regulated fishery. Most species have lost 60–75% of the population within three generations (75–90 years). Furthermore, introduced cats, mice, pigs and rats all kill birds and have destroyed breeding habitats (cf Wanless *et al.* 2007). However, conservation is underway. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR; www.ccamlr.org) proved that special measures for fishery reduced the bycatch of albatrosses around South Georgia by more than 99%. Also, conservation programmes on the breeding grounds are underway, such as rat eradication programmess on South Georgia, after successful similar projects on the New Zealand and Australian subantarctic islands (cf Plantema 2009). Modern science such as GPS and satellite tracking helps to obtain a better understanding of the at-sea distribution and population counts.

Falkland Islands

As readers of Sea Swallow over the years will know, the Falkland Islands have a fascinating range of wildlife, and have the world's largest breeding population of Black-browed Albatross. Together with South Georgia, the archipelago has a long history of human influence on and destruction of the environment. Tall tussock grass (2–3m high) was formerly widespread along the coasts but is nowadays partly destroyed by grazing of sheep. The important seabird colonies attract substantial numbers of ecotourists and make these islands the most frequently visited part of the Subantarctic Islands.

South Georgia

South Georgia is a remote and inhospitable island of 3,700 km^2. More than 50% is glaciated but most of the glaciers have been retreating for more than 100 years. There is no native population on the islands; the present inhabitants are the British Government Officer and scientists and support staff from the British Antarctic Survey, who maintain scientific bases on Bird Island. Among the 30 species recorded on the Island, there are important breeding populations of four penguin species, but South Georgia is also of great importance for albatrosses, with breeding populations of Grey-headed, Light-mantled, Black-browed and Snowy Albatross.

Tristan da Cunha and Gough

Tristan da Cunha is an archipelago comprising five volcanic islands resting on the mid-Atlantic ridge, midway between Africa and South America. The volcano on Tristan, the largest in the group, is over 2,000 m. high, and in 1961 a volcanic eruption forced the 200 islanders to evacuate for several years. Other islands in this archipelago are Nightingale Island and Inaccessible Island. Gough lies c 425 km south-east of Tristan da Cunha. Also volcanic in origin, the Gough group covers 65 km^2 and has a high point of 910 m. These islands have a cool-temperate oceanic climate, with little seasonal variation. Gough holds one of the most important seabird colonies in the world, with some 20 species of breeding seabirds. BirdLife International has classified both Tristan da Cunha and Gough as important Endemic Bird Areas. Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross and Tristan Albatross are the best-known endemic breeders, but other endemic landbirds are found, such as the flightless Gough Moorhen *Gallinula comeri* and Inaccessible Island Rail *Atlantisia rogersi*. Several other species are restricted to Tristan da Cunha and Gough when breeding, including Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata* and Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*.

Snowy Albatross

Snowy Albatross is the largest of the 'great albatrosses' with a wingspan up to 3.50 m. Adults are all-white apart from the dark wingtips and dark trailing edge, pink bill and often pink stain on the ear-coverts, and older adult males develop an almost white (snowy) plumage. Juveniles have a dark brown head and body, with white side of head and throat. Snowy breeds circumpolar on subantarctic islands, with a global population estimate of 8,000 pairs, and all colonies in the Southern Atlantic Ocean are on South Georgia (c 20% of the global breeding population). The species is assessed as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2008). Longline fishing is supposed to be the main cause of decline, causing reductions in adult survival and juvenile recruitment, and this threat remains. Snowy is a biennial breeding species. Adults return to the colonies in November, and courtship is an elaborate ritual, as in all the great albatrosses. Eggs are laid in December–January, most hatch in March, and chicks fledge in December. Birds

usually return to colonies when 5–7 years old and start breeding as young as 7–8 years old, nesting in open or patchy vegetation near exposed ridges or hills. Both breeding and non-breeding birds have very extensive foraging ranges. Satellite-tracking data indicate that breeding birds forage up to 4,000 km from the colonies and that foraging strategies change throughout the breeding season. The vast foraging range means that birds encounter many different longline fleets, and there has been extensive habitat loss and degradation on South Georgia due to the recolonisation of Antarctic Fur Seals *Arctocephalus gazella*. On Prion, one of the Snowy strongholds, I encountered moulting fur seals virtually all over the island in November 2011.

Tristan Albatross

Tristan Albatross looks very similar in plumage to Snowy Albatross. Both species are indistinguishable in the field but Tristan is generally smaller and darker, with a shorter bill. Tristan's breeding population is now restricted to Gough, although in some years a pair breeds on Inaccessible Island. Recently, adults flying over the remote southern part of Tristan fostered hope that the species may return or even may have returned to breed unseen on the rugged remote side of the island. The species nests at 400–700 m altitude, primarily in wet peat, where it is open enough for take-off and landings. It is a colonial, biennially breeding species. Adults return in November, lay eggs in January, and chicks fledge in November. The population has been estimated at 2,700 breeding pairs, and counts suggest a slow decrease in population on Gough. The large colonies on Tristan da Cunha of the past disappeared because of the predation of introduced pigs and rats, and the early settlers (since 1816) caught birds for food. Predation of chicks by introduced House Mice *Mus musculus* on Gough, observed since 2000, has led to a very low fledging success of c 15%. The mice gnaw at the chicks' bodies until they eventually die through blood loss, infection or destruction of vital organs. These House Mice have increased in weight, from 15 g to 'giants' up to 40 g. An eradication programme for the mice is underway, the largest such effort undertaken to date. Longline fishing also kills an estimated 500 individuals every year. As a result, the species is under strong pressure and is therefore classified as 'Critically Endangered' (BirdLife International 2008).

Light-mantled Albatross

This is an elegant small all-dark albatross with slender and pointed wings, diamond-shaped tail, and blue bill stripe. It looks similar to Sooty Albatross but its range is much further south. The species has a circumpolar distribution; dispersing over cold Antarctic waters in summer as far south as the pack ice but ranging north into temperate and subtropical seas in winter. It breeds in the Southern Atlantic Ocean on South Georgia, with 3,000–5,000 pairs. The total annual breeding population of this biennially breeding species is estimated at 19,000–24,000 pairs and it is classified as 'Near Threatened' (BirdLife International 2008). It appears to be declining at a fairly rapid rate, due to longline fishing, (although the mortality for this species is much smaller than for the 'great albatrosses' and mollymawks) and the impact of introduced predators. This species is a biennial breeder and usually nests solitarily or in small colonies on cliff ledges. Birds show dramatic aerial courtship displays, with pairs flying in unison and mirroring each other's movements. Most eggs are laid in October–November and chicks fledge in May–June. Satellite-tracked incubating birds from Macquarie foraged south of the Antarctic Polar Front, an average of 1,500 km from their breeding sites.

Plate 25. Snowy Albatrosses, adult and juvenile. Prion Island, South Georgia 10 Nov 2010. **Plate 26.** Tristan Albatross, adult. Gough Island 11 Apr 2011. **Plate 27.** Light-mantled Albatross.

Plate 28. Sooty Albatross, adult. At sea south of Gough Island. **Plate 29.** Grey-headed Albatrosses, adults. Elsenhul, South Georgia, 14 Nov 2010.

Sooty Albatross

This is a distinctive and entirely dark albatross with diamond-shaped tail, distinguished from Light-mantled Albatross by the darker overall plumage and yellow instead of blue bill stripe. Sooty breeds on isolated islands in temparate or subtropical regions in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, mostly in loose colonies, and prefers cliffs or steep slopes where it can land and take off right next to the nest. The total annual breeding population is estimated at 14,000 pairs, mainly on Gough and Tristan da Cunha, with smaller colonies in the Indian Ocean. This species is classified as 'Endangered' owing to a very rapid decline of 75% over three generations (c 90 years), probably owing to interactions with fisheries, although Sooty is not a major scavenger behind fishing boats.The breeding season extends through the austral summer: eggs are laid in October and November and chicks fledge in May. Successful pairs seldom breed in the following summer. Adults make a combination of long commuting flights early in the incubation period, looping searching flights later in incubation and linear searching during chick brooding. The harvesting of chicks and adults on Tristan da Cunha is banned and illegal poaching is now rare.

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross

Adult Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross has a pale grey head and a yellow stripe along the top of the black bill (adult Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross has a white head). Juveniles are similar to adults but with an entirely white head and all black bill. The species breeds on Gough and in Tristan da Cunha with an estimated 27,500–41,600 breeding pairs. The numbers fluctuate, with a tendency to long-term decline. This species is an annual breeder. Nests are built in tussock grass, on rocks or in scrub; a pedestal is made of mud, peat, feathers and vegetation. Eggs are laid in September and chicks fledge in late March to April. On 6 April 2011 I observed several juveniles on the nest above 600 m on Tristan da Cunha. Experienced breeding birds will attempt to breed in two of every three years and birds usually breed singly or in loose aggregations. They feed by surface-seizing and occasionally diving, and also feed in association with marine mammals or gamefish which bring baitfish to the surface. This species is listed as 'Endangered' (BirdLife International 2008) as it has a very small breeding range and a high mortality in longline fisheries (at least 900 birds per year off the coast of south-eastern Brazil), because it is strongly attracted to fishing vessels. The harvesting of chicks and adults on Tristan is now rare. Although House Mice and Black Rats *Rattus rattus* are present on some breeding islands they have no known effects on breeding success.

Grey-headed Albatross

This is a relatively small black-and-white mollymawk, with a dark ashy-grey head, pale forehead and black bill with bright orange-yellow upper and lower ridge. The species has a circumpolar distribution and breeds on steep slopes with tussock grass and on cliffs, often close to Black-browed Albatross colonies. The world annual breeding population is estimated at 99,000 breeding pairs, about half of which breed on South Georgia. The population is decreasing slowly and the species is qualified as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2008). It is a biennial breeder, although some of the successful breeders attempt to breed annually. Birds return to colonies around late September and fledglings leave in April. Birds feed by surface-seizing (as most albatrosses do) but can also dive up to depths of 6 m. In years of low food availability, chick-rearing birds from South Georgia make very long foraging trips, as far as to the Antarctic Peninsula. Grey-headed is an active scavenger on longline baits, so mortality is high. In 1997–98, more than 10,000 birds (especially juveniles) were killed anually by unregulated fishing. During the non-breeding season, birds from South Georgia have been recorded making global circumnavigations, the fastest in just 46 days.

Black-browed Albatross

This is a striking large black-and-white mollymawk with a bright yellow-orange bill and a distinctive black shadowing around the eye. Black-browed is the most widespread and numerous of all albatrosses, with the majority breeding in the Southern Atlantic Ocean (Falkland Islands, South Georgia). The total breeding population was estimated at 600,000 pairs in 2006/07, with the largest colonies in the Falkland Islands. Numbers in the Falkland Islands apparently increased substantially during the 1980s but, recently the Falklands population has again shown a tendency to decline. The species is listed as 'Endangered' (BirdLife International 2008). Indeed, it is one of the most frequently killed species in longline fisheries, including tuna longliners off southern Africa and pelagic longline swordfish fishery off Chile. Black-browed is a colonial and annual breeder. Individuals arrive at colonies in September, and fledglings leave the colonies in April–May. Birds nest on steep slopes with tussock grass, sometimes on cliff terraces, but the largest colonies in the Falkland Islands are on flat ground along the shore line. Birds from South Georgia may travel up to 3,000 km from their breeding sites, especially to the Antarctic Peninsula.

Plate 30. Black-browed Albatrosses, adults. Pebble Island, Falkland Islands, 1 Dec 2007.

Visiting albatross colonies in the Southern Atlantic Ocean

The Falkland Islands are *the* place to see the Black-browed Albatross breeding colonies. Most visitors of the Falklands are en route to Antarctica, cruising on luxury ships. Individual visitors can fly in from Punta Arenas, Chile, or from the UK. The Falkland airline FIGAS operates a non-scheduled flight service within the archipelago (see www.falklandislands.com/contents/view/116). Limited private accommodation is available in farmhouses and lodges outside Port Stanley. Camping (no facilities) is allowed on some locations. In 1979, 2004 and 2007, I visited the Falkland Islands, camping near the albatross colonies on New Island and Saunders Island.

The best place to see Snowy Albatross nesting is on Prion Island, South Georgia, reachable only by cruise ships (c 20 landings every year) or on a private yacht charter from Port Stanley. Prion Island is closed between mid November and mid January, to prevent disturbance of breeding fur seals at the landing beach. A good place to see the other South Georgian species nesting, is on Elsenhul. I visited South Georgia in November 2010 in a small sailing yacht, and in April 2011 in a cruise ship (I prefer the sailing yacht, because it gives much more flexibility). Landing on the beaches from mid-November until January can be difficult, or even impossible, because of the very aggressive fur seal males, defending their territories.

Tristan Albatross and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross can be seen on trips of Antarctic tourist ships at the end of the season, on their way to western Europe. Every year some cruises call at Gough and Tristan da Cunha, though landing on Tristan and the adjacent Islands to see breeding Yellow-nosed is always uncertain, and indeed with the heavy swell it is often impossible. Access to Gough is prohibited for non-scientists but the albatrosses can be seen here in flight at close range during chumming.

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Balearic Shearwater - Project SeaWatch SW and Project Shearwater - 2014 update

by Dr Russell Wynn

Introduction

For the last eight years a dedicated team of UK scientists, conservationists and seabird enthusiasts have contributed to a programme of research and conservation focused on the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater and other migratory seabirds. This programme has two main components: the 'SeaWatch SW' project, which involved collection of land- and boat-based data from UK waters between 2007 and 2011 (see www.seawatch-sw.org), and the ongoing 'Project Shearwater', which involves work at Balearic Shearwater breeding colonies in the Mediterranean and tracking of the birds at sea throughout the year. For an overview of 2013 Project Shearwater activities, and links to reports from earlier years, see: http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=3925

This latest article provides an update on progress in summer 2014, and hopefully illustrates the important role that 'citizen science' is playing in the conservation of this threatened seabird.

SeaWatch SW data

The field surveys and data analysis for SeaWatch SW have been underpinned by a number of postgraduate students based at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton (NOC). The first of these, Dr Alice Jones, successfully completed her PhD at NOC in 2012 using SeaWatch SW data and is now a postdoctoral researcher at University of Adelaide in Australia. Alice's first paper has just been published in the respected science journal 'Endangered Species Research', and is entitled '*Using integrated land- and boat-based surveys to inform conservation of the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater*'. The paper involves a partnership between SeaWatch SW, Marinelife and French colleagues, and leans heavily upon data collected by a large number of volunteer expert observers in the UK and France.

Plate 31. Close-up of a Balearic Shearwater on Sa Dragonera, Balearic Islands. © *Andrew Colenutt*

The study highlights the importance of the western English Channel for Balearic Shearwaters, with up to 20% of the global population regularly feeding and roosting in embayments off northwest France during the summer and autumn inter-breeding period, and up to 2% of the population sporadically visiting Lyme Bay or passing along the southwest UK coast during this period. In addition, the intensive effort-based observations undertaken by the SeaWatch SW team off southwest UK have provided important information on the species' migratory behaviour in the region, e.g. the timing of peak passage rates in the daily cycle, and the fact that Balearic Shearwaters often pass closer inshore than other similar species. The ESR paper is Open Access and can be downloaded free at: http://www.int-res.com/articles/esr_oa/n025p001.pdf

The data included in the ESR paper have also been used by JNCC and Natural England to assess potential Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for Balearic Shearwater in UK waters, particularly off southwest UK. In addition, the SeaWatch SW survey site at Gwennap Head, Porthgwarra, looks out over the Runnelstone Reef, which has been included in the second tranche of proposed Marine Conservation Zones in English waters. Although largely focused on benthic habitats and species, Balearic Shearwaters are listed as a supporting feature at this site. Further information can be found at the links below: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3750434 http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/MCZ/lands-end

A further SeaWatch SW scientific paper, looking in more detail at seasonal and daily patterns in seabird movements around southwest England (including Balearic Shearwater) is currently being prepared. This will use the unique effort-based sightings data to highlight the importance of the southwest UK flyway for migratory seabirds. It is intended that once this paper is completed all of the raw SeaWatch SW seabird data will be available for download on a public archive; this will provide a valuable baseline that can be revisited in future years.

Finally, a follow-on project from SeaWatch SW has focused on high-resolution mapping of seabird foraging aggregations in mid-winter in St Ives Bay, in order to provide evidence to support mitigation measures for prevention of seabird bycatch in fixed fishing gears. After a successful first phase of fieldwork in winter 2012/13, a second phase was undertaken in January 2014. Small numbers of Balearic Shearwaters were again recorded at this now regular wintering site, as well as unusual mid-winter records of Manx and Sooty Shearwaters. The results of this work are currently being prepared for another PhD thesis at NOC. Background to this ongoing work can be found at: https://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?print=1&a=3557

Plate 32. The Project Shearwater team with two tagged Balearic Shearwaters from a newly discovered cave on Sa Dragonera, Balearic Islands. © *Andrew Colenutt*

Project Shearwater data

Since spring 2010, a team of UK and Mallorcan scientists and conservationists have been undertaking annual field expeditions to the Balearic Shearwater breeding colonies on Mallorca and Menorca, in order to undertake tracking studies and find out more about the birds' at-sea movements and behaviour. This work has been supported by a number of organisations, including NERC, RSPB, Natural England and the Balearic Islands Government. In spring 2014, the 'Project Shearwater' team spent a productive fortnight in the Balearic Islands, working at three main sites: the large cave colony at Sa Cella on Mallorca, the island natural park of Sa Dragonera, and La Mola on Menorca.

Plate 33. Balearic Shearwater nest boxes ready for deployment on Sa Dragonera, Balearic Islands. © *Greg Morgan*

At Sa Cella, the team successfully collected a fourth year of geolocator and GPS tracking data from breeding birds, further underlining the pattern observed in previous years. GPS tracking has revealed that during the incubation phase of the breeding period the birds undertake regular foraging trips to the Catalonian coast (with some birds also feeding along the northern coasts of Mallorca and Menorca). After breeding, all adult birds migrate out of the Mediterranean and spend the late summer and autumn in Atlantic hotspots off west Iberia and northwest France. These data have been used to support identification of Important Bird Areas in Portugal, and highlight the importance of some of the IBAs recently designated in Spain: http://www.acap.aq/news/latest-news/1829-spain-s-new-marine-protected-areas-considered-good-for-acap-listed-balearic-shearwaters

On Sa Dragonera, the pilot tracking study started in 2013 was continued, and we are now starting to gain useful data on the movements of birds from this colony. We also continued our census work, which over the coming years will hopefully show indications of a recovery of breeding numbers following recent rat eradication on the island. In spring 2014, Greg Morgan from RSPB led the development and deployment of several Balearic Shearwater nest boxes, in the hope that these will encourage the local shearwaters to nest in more secure and accessible sites (some of the funding for these boxes was kindly provided by Thousand Islands Expeditions).

A scientific paper describing the background to the census work on Sa Dragonera can now be downloaded from The Seabird Group website, in volume 26 of their journal, *Seabird*: http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk/?page=seabird_26

At La Mola, a lot of hard graft over several years has now yielded ten high-quality geolocator tracks of 'Menorcan Shearwaters', providing important new information on the year-round movements of these enigmatic birds (they appear to sit taxonomically somewhere between Yelkouan and Balearic Shearwaters). The results are currently being analysed, but initial indications are that the Menorca Shearwaters employ a different migration strategy from Balearic Shearwaters on adjacent islands, and yet are also different from Yelkouan Shearwaters tracked from French colonies. This information has been provided to BOURC to aid their assessment of the first British record of Yelkouan Shearwater, seen off Berry Head in 2008 during the SeaWatch SW project.

In the coming months a NOC PhD student, Rhiannon Meier, will be preparing a series of scientific papers based on these tracking data, some of which were recently presented by Rhiannon at the recent Seabird Group conference at University of Oxford.

Acknowledgements

First, we would like to say a big thankyou to the large number of organisations and individuals that have supported SeaWatch SW and Project Shearwater, either through direct funding or volunteering their time and resources. The Project Shearwater team are very grateful to Biel Sevilla for his continued support of fieldwork activities on Sa Dragonera in 2014. Joan Mayol Serra (Conservation Dept of the Balearic Islands Government) and Marti Mayol (Sa Dragonera National Park) again provided valuable assistance with permits and logistics, which have been essential for our fieldwork activities. The Director and staff at the Jaume Ferrer biological field station are thanked for providing accommodation at La Mola.

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The Round Island Petrel

by Dr WRP Bourne

Round Island off Mauritius is one of those places where seabirds that get into the wrong ocean tend to settle. There has been confusion over the years as to which members of the subgenus *Hallstroma* of gadfly petrels are included, and this has now been reviewed by Carl Jones *et al.* in the last volume on the Malagasy Region of the *Birds of Africa* edited by Roger Safford and Frank Hawkins (8: 142–149, 2013).

It appears that the birds may have been present by the nineteenth century. An egg was taken in 1932, and two specimens now in New York in 1952 which have given rise to much debate. It now appears to be agreed that about 80% of the population of 1000–1500 birds resemble the Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana* of the South Atlantic, referred to locally as the Round Island Petrel, with about 10% each of the Herald Petrel *P. heraldica* and Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta* and reports of the Phoenix Petrel *P. alba* of the Pacific. There is a good deal of hybridisation, including the two birds in New York, possibly crosses between the Trindade and Kermadec petrels, in which case it is not surprising they gave rise to debate..

The Round Island Petrel is now known to be present there throughout the year, with a peak in laying between August and October, and birds dispersing throughout the Indian Ocean north of 40 S except for the Mozambique Channel, and a ringing recovery from India. The Herald Petrel, which can be hard to distinguish, is proved to occur with it because there has been a ringing recovery of a bird from Raine Island, NE Australia. It has also been reported from Cousin Island in the Seychelles, with several records of the Kermadec Petrel, which bred there in 2009, so this place clearly also needs to be watched.The point is made that the 1000–1500 Round Island Petrels may be of unnoticed importance for conservation since there may be no more than 3000–5000 pairs of the Trindade Petrel in the Atlantic, and the situation there as well might also be complicated by hybridisation.

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South Georgia de-ratting update

by Professor Tony Martin, Habitat Restoration Director, South Georgia Heritage Trust

(All photographs taken by the author)

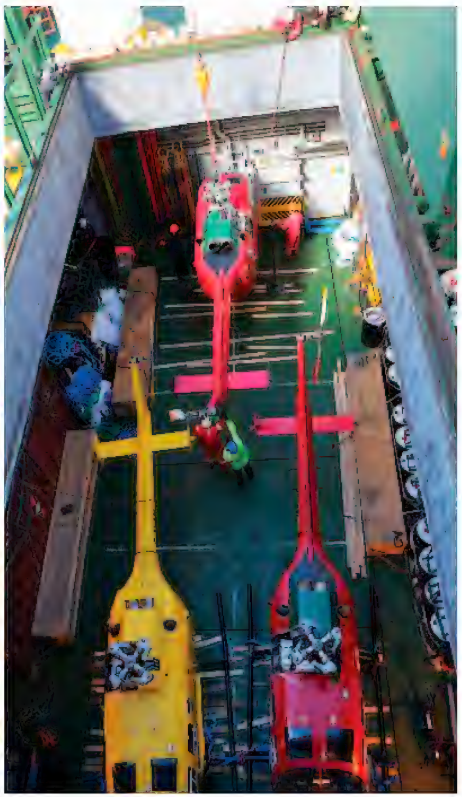
Readers of volume 62 (2013) may recall reading an article by Alison Neil of the South Georgia Heritage Trust in which she described an ambitious project aimed at eradicating all invasive rodents from the island of South Georgia. Alison's article was immediately followed by a note from Warrant Officer Tony Tindale, from *HMS Protector*, who came ashore at the long-abandoned Husvik whaling station and met the team of people carrying out the work - Team Rat! A year down the track, I am very pleased to be able to bring further news of the project, all of it good!

Plate 34. South Georgia Rat eating bait.

South Georgia is a UK Overseas Territory situated in the sub-Antarctic at the very southern end of the South Atlantic, about 1400 km East of the Falkland Islands. It is so much larger than any other island on which rodent eradication has been attempted that the operation has had to be split over three seasons. The first season of work was carried out in 2011, and I'm delighted to say that no rodents have been seen in the areas treated that year, so we are cautiously optimistic that this Phase 1 operation was successful.

Phase 2 was carried out between February and June 2013, using the two original helicopters and a third one bought in to increase bait-spreading capacity. During that period a monumental 580 sq km (227 sq miles) was treated for rodents, using nearly 200 tonnes of bait and 600 drums of aviation fuel. Our veteran helicopters flew 600 hours between them in the course of the season!

Almost a year later (March/April 2014) we sent a team of people back to South Georgia to search for signs of rats and mice in the areas treated in 2013. They deployed around 1,000 detection devices and walked many hundreds of miles, visiting every area where bait was sown. I am very pleased and relieved to be able to report that not one rodent was seen, not one was photographed by our automatic cameras, no peanut butter-impregnated stick was chewed and no tell-tale footprints were seen in the snow or mud. It is far too early to be sure of success in the Phase 2 areas, but we can at least say 'so far, so good'.



Plates 35–36. Left: Loading bait at Husvik. **Right:** 3 cabs in the hold of RRS Ernest Shackleton.

Plate 37. Helo at work.

Buoyed by this good news, preparations for the third (and we hope final) phase of the South Georgia operation continue apace, with the intention of eliminating the final rat in early 2015. Once again, the British Antarctic Survey supply ship RRS *Ernest Shackleton* will be chartered to take Team Rat, its helicopters, its equipment and its supplies to the island. By the end of March I expect that the 90 tonnes of bait in our depots will have been thinly spread over the southernmost third of South Georgia and, all being well, more than two centuries of devastation caused by stowaway rats and mice will have been consigned to history. Within weeks, the delightful South Georgia pipit should begin to recolonise the treated areas, and the seabirds will follow suit over the coming years and decades. The recovery of South Georgia's native wildlife will have begun, and hopefully many members of the RNBWS will be able to witness this historic rejuvenation in the coming years!

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A time for tubenoses

by Simon Cook

(All photographs taken by the author)

By any measure March 2014 was exceptional for the number and variety of tubenose birds that I recorded aboard ships, given that for a good part of the month I was ashore in the UK. Species from the following families were represented: albatrosses, petrels, diving-petrels, prions and storm-petrels.

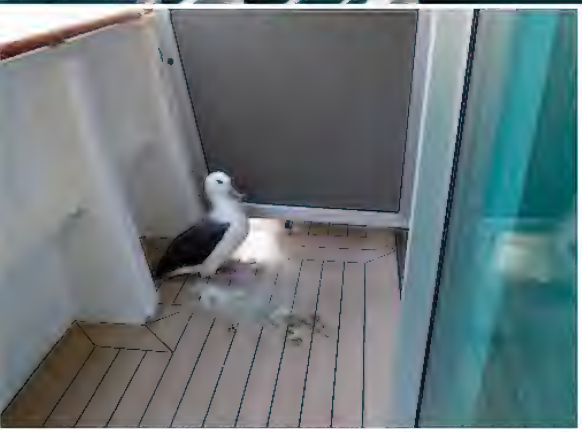
On 2 March I was within moments of disembarking from *MV Le Boreal* in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. My contract had just finished and I was just about to leave the ship when a lady came up to me at the top of the gangway to tell me of a strange bird on her balcony, and showed me a picture. I immediately recognised it as an immature Black-browed Albatross. The previous evening we had entered the eastern end of a very breezy Beagle Channel, and there had been many albatrosses around the ship. The lady too was just about to leave the ship so we hurtled up to her cabin.

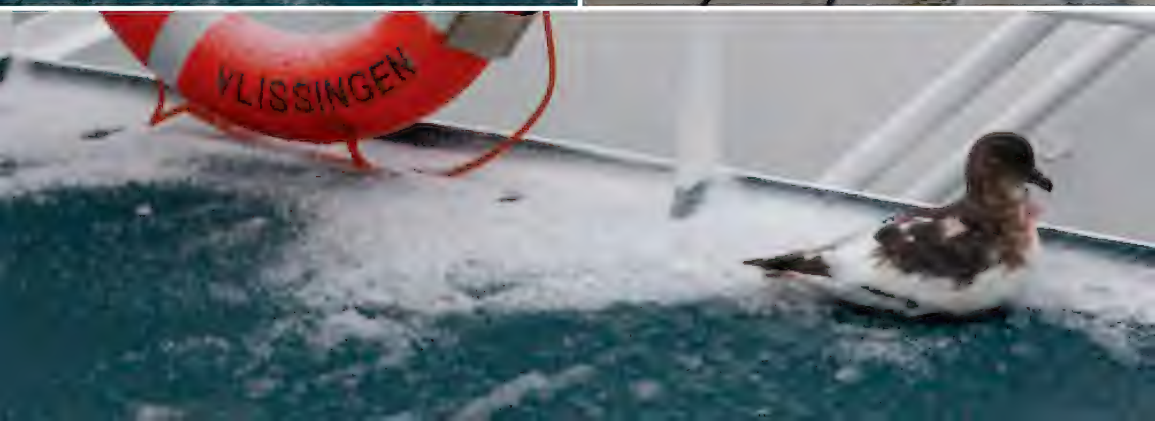
The bird was still in the corner of the balcony, resting on its legs, and judging by the amount of guano on the deck had been there for some time. Both wings were folded normally and, considering the restricted space into which it had flown, the bird appeared to be uninjured. After taking a few photographs I picked up a bathrobe and dropped it over the albatross, being careful to hold the bill through the robe, and then picked the bird up, sat it on the handrail and helped it drop to the water, not far below. After looking around for a second or two the albatross ran across the water, flapping strongly and took off successfully. This was the first albatross that I had seen on board a ship so it was very exciting.

I was then 'grounded' until 19 March when, in Ushuaia again, I joined the *MV Plancius* for a long repositioning voyage at the end of the Antarctic summer season. Our ultimate destination was the Cape Verde Islands, off West Africa. During the morning of 23 March the ship was approaching the South Shetland Islands. Having been outside for a while I repaired to the lounge for a cup of warming coffee and was called over to one of the front windows. Outside on the snowy deck was a Southern Fulmar, which was a big surprise as this species in this area is vastly outnumbered by the Cape Petrel. Going outside I picked the bird up, held it up briefly for those inside to see and then released it. This bird was the first of its kind that I'd seen on a ship for some 15 years.

Immediately after lunch a colleague of mine saw a single Antarctic Petrel flying close to the ship but I could not catch up with it. Not long afterwards I was alerted to a "Cape Petrel" on deck but found that it was the Antarctic Petrel. It looked a bit tatty and there were cuts on both wings, with blood on the feathers. I could not imagine how the bird could have injured itself by hitting the ship so concluded that it came aboard already injured, perhaps attacked by either a skua or a giant-petrel, both common here. After getting the nearest people out to see the bird I picked it up and released it. Despite its injuries it flew off strongly without dropping down to land on the water. Like the albatross, this was my first Antarctic Petrel aboard a ship.

Plates 38–42 (opposite). Clockwise from the top: Plancius off S. Georgia; Black-browed Albatross; Antarctic Petrel; Antarctic Petrel; Black-browed Albatross on board.




VLISSINGEN

The ship's next destination was South Georgia, where there are very strict regulations about ships showing lights at night. This arose from an incident some years ago when a cruise ship sailed at night close to seabird breeding areas with all lights blazing. The result was that countless numbers of small seabirds ended up aboard and that led subsequently to visible lights being banned. Thus it was on the night of 28/29 March as the *Plancius* approached Cape Disappointment, at the southern tip of South Georgia after dark. Unfortunately, visibility was poor and there was a good deal of ice about, and the Captain decided that regrettable though it might be, it was necessary to use one of the searchlights to ensure the safety of the ship.

Looking out at approximately 22.30 I saw several prions on the deck near the bow and went out to investigate. Many other airborne birds were flying around us. At first I started catching and releasing but this soon became an impossible task, for the ship seemed to be the centre of a blizzard of birds. There was no wind at all, which probably made it much easier for many of the birds to land on the deck. There were a few corpses too; I suspect that most of them had been struck by the revolving radar arms. I patrolled the ship until 03.00, when I finally went to bed. By this time the decks and external stairways were covered with hundreds of birds, mostly prions.

At dawn the next morning I was up again and spent two hours picking up birds and releasing them; others helped too. Shortly after breakfast we landed in Fortuna Bay and once back aboard an effort was made to winkle out all the remaining birds. I found one prion wedged into a vertical deck drain and only managed to extract it by grabbing its tail and pulling gently. Wherever it was possible for a bird to be, there was at least one there. Birds found later in the day were boxed overnight, for some of the weaker birds released earlier were caught by skuas or giant petrels. I estimated that of the hundreds of birds on the ship at 03.00 most got off by themselves at first light but at least 200 more needed help from us.

I would say that about 95% of the birds were Antarctic Prions, with just one Fairy Prion. Other species included Blue Petrel (30–40), Diving-Petrels (ca. 40 but none examined as I felt that they were stressed enough already), about six each of Wilson's and Black-bellied Storm-petrel, and a single Kerguelan Petrel.

Although I have previously seen large falls of (migrating) land birds on ships I have never seen anything like this with seabirds. Although in the circumstances it was unavoidable, the captain was very upset at the trouble the ship's lights had caused.

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Plates 43–49 (opposite). Left, from top: S Fulmar; Black-bellied Storm-petrel; Antarctic Prions. Right, from top: Blue Petrel; Kerguelen Petrel; Antarctic Prions.

Plate 50. A Streaked Shearwater along with Flesh-footed Shearwaters. © *Amith Kuma*

Pelagic offshore birding from Southern India 2013

by J Praveen (RNBWS rep for India)

Interest in Pelagic birding in India is on the rise and there have been more and more off-shore trips since my last update in Sea Swallow 62. Trips undertaken in 2013 from the southern coastal states, with Maharashtra joining in this time, are summarised in Table 1. Kerala has now the distinction of being the first state to have done at least one pelagic trip from all nine coastal districts. As a mark of growing interest in this arena, the Social Forestry Wing of Kerala Forest Department has come forward to sponsor pelagic bird studies.

This is just a short summary of the scene. All records of regional importance have been already published in *Indian BIRDS* and I encourage readers to consult the references for more information. Along with the summary of pelagic trips, this report also includes important random reports made elsewhere in the country.

The most remarkable record was a wind-blown Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* that was recovered from the coasts of Kerala before it died of exhaustion. This is the first record from south Asia and the skin is deposited in the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) Collection, Kozhikode (Praveen *et. al.* 2013b). The first Indian Short-tailed Shearwaters *Ardenna tenuirostris* (Sen *et al.* 2013) in April 2013 and the first Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* in July 2013 (Prasad 2013) for the Bay of Bengal were birds photographed from the riverine islands around Sundarbans. Short-tailed Shearwaters need to be carefully watched for in late April and May as another two more birds were recorded off-shore in Kerala in April 2014 (E.S.Praveen *et al. in prep*) indicating a possible spring dispersal to the northern Indian Ocean. These birds were accompanied by a single Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica*. Records of Swinhoe's Storm-petrels *Hydrobates monorhis* continued to grow (Table 2), confirming its status as a regular autumn migrant, with some numbers present throughout the year. Eight Streaked Shearwaters *Calonectris leucomelas* were recorded off the coast of Nileshwaram, Kerala on 22 September 2013 indicating that it may possibly now be treated as a regular visitor to the northern Indian Ocean. A putative

Brown Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* was photographed on the same day but identification to species level eliminating a dark morph South Polar Skua is considered problematic. Overall jizz indicated a heavy bird with barrel-shaped body, large head and strong bill; all pointing to Brown Skua. An adult pale morph South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* was photographed off the Chennai coast in August 2013 (Manivannan & Mohan 2013). The cyclone *Phailin* brought to land several Long-tailed Jaegers *Stercorarius longicaudus* from the Bay of Bengal and they were photographed resting on the River Mahanadi, Odisha. Ukil & Karuthedathu (2014) described at least five different birds of various ages and this appears to be the second confirmed Indian record. Interesting tern species recorded include a flock of Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* photographed off Kerala coast (Karuthedathu & Raju 2013) and a Lesser Noddy photographed off Kanyakumari coast (Manivannan *et al.* 2014) - both rarities to peninsular India and recorded in September 2013. An exhausted White Tern *Gygis alba* was recovered nearly 50km inland from Kerala coast in July 2013 (Jayson *et. al.* 2013) and is the first record for the Indian mainland. Observations from the oil tanker *Cobalt Blue* in 2013 produced the first live Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* sighting from India apart from a photograph of Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* (Anuj Gandhe *in prep*). All the birds were recorded during pelagic trips and their numbers are shown in Table 2. Amongst land birds recovered at sea, an exhausted Common Swift *Apus apus* was recovered by fishermen some 20–25km from the Kerala coast, but sadly died after a few days (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2014).

In terms of publications, the most significant update is the update of the Indian Rarities Review beginning with seabirds (Praveen *et al.* 2013a). This paper clarified the status of all seabirds that have been reported for India except gulls and terns (they will be covered later). The examination was rigorous; many species that were reported but not well documented were excluded. This included species like Mascerene Petrel *Pseudobulweria aterrima* which was provisionally included in the Indian list based on a specimen collected in 1940, but which was then lost for a long time and hence not

Table 1. 2013 monthly summary of offshore trips.

States	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Maharashtra										1	1	
Karnataka										1		
Kerala				2		1		1	1	2	1	
Tamil Nadu								1	1			

Table 2. Abundance of pelagic birds during surveys.

Species	% of Days/	(number of Days)
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	7.7%	(1)
Short-tailed Shearwater	7.7%	(1)
Streaked Shearwater	7.7%	(1)
Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes*	69.2%	(9)
Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*	61.5%	(7)
Swinhoe's Storm-petrel	38.5%	(5)
Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*	7.7%	(1)
South Polar Skua	7.7%	(1)
Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*	15.4%	(2)
Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*	76.9%	(10)
Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*	69.2%	(9)
Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*	23.1%	(3)
Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*	7.7%	(1)
Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*	7.7%	(1)

Plate 51. A possible Brown Skua. © *Amith Kumar*

re-examined. This specimen was recently located in the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, National University of Singapore, and its real identity revealed as a Jouanin's Petrel (Praveen & Kelvin 2013). Another example was the Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi*, its original entry based on the photographs of a single specimen in the ZSI Collections, Kolkata. However, a reassessment of the same specimen a few months later indicated that the morphometrics and plumage match the Great Frigatebird *F. minor* better and hence the former species is recommended for deletion from the Indian checklist (Maheswaran & Islam 2014). Karuthedathu (2014) provided a paper on retrospective identification of a Long-tailed Jaeger photographed in March 2012 which was formerly left unidentified. This is the first reliable record of this species from India while he also presented and discussed photographs of two other putative Long-tailed Jaegers from the west coast of India.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dipu Karuthedathu for reviewing an earlier draft and helping to summarise the survey data. Amith Kumar willingly shared his images for this article and my thanks to him too. And to the many others now organising and participating in these pelagics - too many to name - my thanks for helping to increase our knowledge of the northern Indian ocean.

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Birds seen between Valparaiso and Juan Fernandes in the Niño winter of 1983

by Dr WRP Bourne

In 1983 I was invited by Gerry Clark to visit Juan Fernandes with him during his tour of the Southern Ocean in his home-made 10m yacht Totorore (Clark 1988), and it may be useful to record details of the birds we saw for which there was no room in our original report (Bourne *et al.*, 1992). I met Gerry in Valparaiso and we spent several days there on repairs before setting out for Juan Fernandes on 27 May; this enabled me to look at the birds of that coast for purposes of comparison with those of the islands. Many seabirds could be seen from the shore (Table 1, column 1) with obscure movements with the tide, the weather and the time of day that I had not time to work out. On 26th May a trial trip some 15km south along the coast in the early morning revealed thousands of boobies and hundreds of pelicans roosting on an islet off Punta Caraumilla. They dispersed mainly south-west after dawn, while hundreds of Sooty Shearwaters flew north up the coast. In the absence of comparative experience it was impossible to say whether the bird numbers offshore were affected by the occurrence of a warm El Niño to the north, but it may explain the presence of tropicbirds and a Guanay at Juan Fernandez.

The sea offshore was turbid with much garbage and a great many birds. Some 500m offshore it met cleaner water at a line of scum, with a wall of garbage held vertically below it, presumably the margin of the cool, northbound Humboldt Current. Along this line there were a Slender-billed Prion, a large skua, a summer Red-necked Phalarope, a score of Wilson's Storm-petrels, and small numbers of Sooty Shearwaters and Guanay Cormorants. Inside the line were fair numbers of the storm-petrels and shearwaters and a few Inca Terns, with six Southern Fulmars off the fishing station, and in the docks Humboldt Penguins, terns, and a single sea lion. More marine birds including southern species increased at first out to sea, and tailed off as the water temperature rose towards Juan Fernandes, where most of the summer visitors such as Pink-footed Shearwaters and Stejneger's Petrels had left, though there were still a good many Juan Fernandes and De Filippi's Petrels over warmer water (Table 1).

The birds of Juan Fernandes have been reviewed by Hahn *et al.* (2009). The landbirds are related to those of South America, but the seabirds to those of the South Pacific, and especially those of the New Zealand area, which feed over the cool Humboldt Current offshore, so Juan Fernandes can almost be regarded from the point of view of marine ornithology as an outlier of New Zealand. In the Niño year 1983 some warmer-water species such as tropicbirds and a Guanay were seen unusually far south around Juan Fernandes - it was impossible from lack of experience to assess the situation along the coast.

The following points seem of note (JF - Juan Fernandez group, MT - Masatierra or Robinson Crusoe, MF - Masafuera or Alexander Selkirk, SC - islet of Santa Clara off the first, WRPB - WRP Bourne, GSC - GS Clark. Scientific nomenclature of seabirds in RNBWS checklist, WT - water temperature):

Table 1. Summary of observations at sea.

Longitude: °W	Coast:71.5	71–73	73–75	75–77	77–79	79–81
Places	Valparaiso	Hum-	bolt	Current	Masatierra	Masafuera
Dates (1983)	24–27/5, 24/6	27/5,24/6	28/5,22/6	(29/5).	30/5, 13,17,21/6	2/6,12/6
Minutes out	150	100	370	(50)	310	300
Minutes back		270		210	280	30
Water temp C	13.0	13.5–15.5	14.4–15.2	14.6–16.8	15.5–16.5	17.4
Penguin Sp.	10s	4				
Northern Royal Albatross		5				
Black-Browed Albatross	107	59	9	19	39	13
Shy Albatross		1				
Salvin's Albatross		43+				
Buller's Albatross		2				
Giant Petrel sp.		1		1	1	1
Southern Fulmar		2				
Cape Petrel sp.		89+	1	11	8	
Prion Sp.		1	23	6	7	9
Blue Petrel		1	3	1		
Kerguelen Petrel			1			
White-headed Petrel		1				
Juan Fernandes Petrel				5	46	102
De Filippi's Petrel		10		1	26	
Stejneger's Petrel						2
Grey Petrel				1		
White-chinned Petrel		36	49	41	18	4
Sooty Shearwater	10,210+	25	22	1	1	1
Pink-footed Shearwater					2	1
ilson's Storm-petrel	110	41	25	3	1	
Grey-backed Storm-petrel			1			
White-bellied Storm-petrel				5	24	
Diving-petrel sp.	4					
Red-billed Tropic-bird				1		
Yellow-billed Tropic-bird					1	
Peruvian Pelican	1894	42				
Peruvian Booby	1259	64				
Red-legged Cormorant	3					
Bigua Cormorant	+					
Guanay Cormorant	926				1	
Large Skua sp.	1					
Kelp Gull	1137+	21				
Grey Gull		1				
Brown-headed Gull	41					
S American/Arctic Tern	9					
Inca Tern	54	7				
Total birds	**15766+**	**469+**	**117**	**99**	**177**	**124**
Birds/hour	**6304**	**76**	**22**	**28**	**18**	**23**

Penguins. The Humboldt Penguin was said to have been shot by Reed (1874), but he thought it did not breed. The botanist Johow (1898) reported it was breeding on Santa Clara, but this is unlikely when they (like us) were there in June, and it seems likely he misidentified the conspicuous unoccupied shearwater burrows.

Shy Albatross. One at 33°45´S 80°45'W off MF (WT 11.4°C) on 2.6.83 (WRPB).

Chatham Albatross. Seen 32° 39'S 80°44'W (110km N Masafuera, WT 15.5°C) on 5.8.95 (Howell *et al.* 1996).

Giant Petrels *Macronectes sp.* Reported at intervals; an immature Southern Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* seen in Cumberland Bay on 15.6.83 (WRPB).

Prions *Pachyptila sp.* Seen at intervals, including at least five Slender-billed Prions *P. belcheri* among nine at 33°29'S 77°40'W, WT 15.6°C on 21.6.83, and one off Valparaiso on 24.6.83 (WRPB).

Blue Petrel. One seen on 22.6.83, WT 14.6°C (WRPB). Howell *et al.* (1996) reported it at 32°39'S 80°44'W (110km N Masafuera), WT 15.5°C on 5.8.95.

White-headed Petrel. One 29.5.83, WT 16.5°C (GSC); Howell *et al.* (1996) saw 44 between 24.4°S 86.4°W and 36.6°S 77.8°W on 3–6.8.95, WT 16.9°C, 10 of 34 in wing moult.

Magenta Petrel. Howell *et al.* (1996) report one at 32°39'S 80°44'W (110km N Masafuera), WT 15.5°C, on 5.8.95.

Kermadec Petrel. Seen between 73–78°W at 33°S during 28–30.5.83, and singles at 33°S 80°W off MF during 10. and 11.6.83 (GSC). Nine seen from 33°S 73°W 28.5.83, to MF on 12.6.83, two at 33°29'S 77°40'W on 21.6.83, and 12 over slopes and 9 in holes SC on 18.6.83 (WRPB).

Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookie* '*orientalis*'. Murphy described this from a bird collected within sight of MI in December 1913 as a local form, but it was identified by Falla (1942) as the young of the nominate form from New Zealand.

Grey Petrel. One seen at 33°29'S 77°40'W, WT 15.6°C, on 21.6.83 (WRPB, GSC).

Pink-footed and Flesh-footed Shearwaters. Bones of the first, from the west end of MT, where formerly many unidentified seabirds bred, and elsewhere on MT, are very similar to those of the second, of which WRPB (1962) has suggested it was probably a dark morph. Dr Guiking (pers. comm.) reports that on MT the main colony of ca 2,200 burrows is on a poorly vegetated area between Pangal and Puerto Frances, with about 400 at Vaqueria in the north, ten at Tierras Blancas by the airfield-Villagra road, and several at the south-west tip La Punta (though it was not clear which holes belonged to rabbits). On SC there were 100 at the campsite and 900 on the upper plain. There were around 2,600 on MT, 1,500–2000 on SC, and also 20–25,000 holes at Mocha on the coast. Thus a total population of about 65,000 breeding pairs; not a lot for a shearwater.

Grey-backed Storm-petrel. One a day out of Valparaiso, 28/5, WT ca 15°C (WRPB).

White-bellied Storm-petrel. 23 seen off north-east MT on 30.5.83, and one fledgling on Morro Vinilla 13.6.83, old eggs found there and on SC (WRPB).

Red-billed Tropicbird. Two seen 30°S 75°W on 30.6.70 (Jehl 1973). One seen south-east of MT 17.6.83 (WRPB).

Yellow-billed Tropicbird. One first seen 50m south of MT at 34°S 79°W on 4.5.83, following the yacht to MT next day, where seen again visiting slopes of Cumberland Bay 6.5.83 (GSC).

Masked Booby. First seen northbound at about 31°S 78°W, 180m north of MT, 2.5.86 (B. Bewsher per RNBWS).

Guanay Cormorant. One, in Cumberland Bay 6.5.83 (GSC).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. This is a recent colonist in the Americas. A white egret was first reported on MT in December 1982 (Perry 1984), M.Hurst saw one on MT on 6.5.83, and two on 21.5.83, and WRPB saw 3 live birds and 2 bodies at Las Casas, MF on 2.6.83.

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*. One female present a few days, Puerto Frances, MT 5/6.2.00 (D.Guicking pers. comm.).

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*. A pair at MT airfield on 19.6.83 (WRPB).

Large Skua *Catharacta sp*. One off MT 15/16.6.70 (Jehl 1973) and 5.5.83 (GSC), one around 38°S 78°W, and two around 31°S 78°W on l and 2 May 1986.(B. Bewsher per RNBWS).

Sabine's Gull. Clark (1986) saw one at 36°S 80°W (WT 17.4°) on 2.5.83.

Swallow-tailed Gull. Jehl (1973) collected one at 36°12'S 74°76'W on 13.6.70.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*. One off SC on 6.83 (WRPB).

Grey-flanked Cinclodes *Cinclodes oustelet*i. This normally seems to be restricted to MF. Johnson & Goodall (1963–72) report that W.R. Millie found it common on MT, where there appear to be few or no reliable records. Possibly as in some other cases they misquoted the island where he saw it.

The origin of three specimens supplied by Leybold to Salvin in 1875 said to come from JF and now in the (British) Natural History Musem, **Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni***, the **Long-winged Harrier *Circus buffoni***, and the **Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*** seems questionble.

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Plate 52. Middle Hill.

RAFOS Sponsored expedition to Gibraltar upper rock 2013

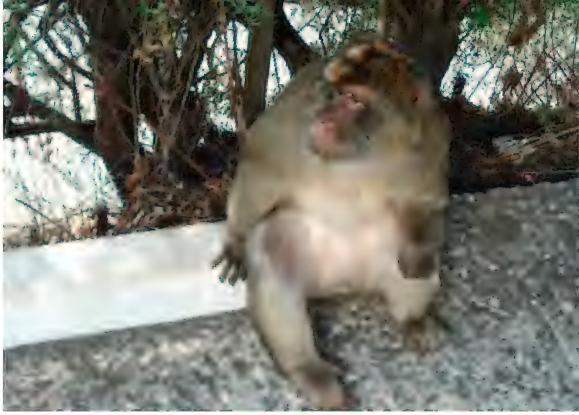
by Julia Springett

(All photographs taken by Robin Springett)

Whilst ringing at Jew's Gate in 2012 the idea was hatched to gather birding data from a different area of the Rock, and after discussion with Charlie Perez it was decided that an area of the Upper Rock Nature Reserve would provide the ideal site. RAFOS took the lead on this Tri-Service Expedition and over a period of four weeks six ringers and three observers from AOS, RAFOS and RNBWS monitored the site.

September 2013 saw the first four members of the team assemble and take up residence at Bruce's Farm. A vehicle had kindly been loaned from Headquarters British Forces Gibraltar and this was duly collected from Devil's Tower camp. Driving permits were secured and the team were ready to start. The ringing equipment was provided by the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society, and this included all the mist nets and poles, rings, bird bags, pliers, rules etc, and of course the all essential bird guide books for those rarities we hoped to see.

The aim of the expedition was to catch and ring migrating birds in the area around Governor's Lookout on the Northern side of the Upper Rock, an area that has not been used for this purpose for over 25 years. Nets were positioned along the fire breaks which meant that little cutting back of the natural vegetation was required. This was at first a little haphazard, but the team soon learned where best to set the nets and which were most likely to catch. A total of over 300 metres of mist nets was erected, forming a circular net of ½ kilometre at altitude varying from 280–360 metres above sea level. The ringing station was carefully selected at a mid-point of the round beneath overhanging vegetation which provided much needed shade, both for the birds in bags waiting to be processed and for the ringers during the heat of the day. The ringing station had the added benefit of affording glorious views across to Africa and the Atlas mountains as well as Algeciras and the Strait of Gibraltar. During quiet times it was also possible to watch the constant shipping activity, pleasure, fishing and sail boats as well as boats being rowed within the confines of the harbour.



A daily routine was soon established; out to the site before sunrise to open the nets while it was still dark, though there was plenty of ambient light coming up from the city. The birds begin to feed shortly after dawn, and that was the time for the first net round. On several occasions we were lucky enough to catch Common and Red-necked Nightjar; both of which make a strange hissing noise when handled and are uncannily prehistoric in appearance. The day would progress with checking the nets at regular intervals, extracting and processing the birds until early afternoon when conditions became very warm and the birds would stop feeding. This would be the time to furl the nets and retire to our lodgings, snatch a quick siesta before transferring data onto the computer at the Jews' Gate Bird Observatory and then having supper and preparing for the following day's ringing.

The weather conditions over the period were mostly good, with on most days heavy Levante which would clear slowly and keep the birds feeding locally rather than moving off to the South. Few days were lost completely to unfavourable weather, but we never experienced the type of weather that would have produced a really large fall of migrants; it was very warm right into late October. The numbers of birds processed daily varied from 11 on the lowest catch to 147 which was the very best. The total for the trip was 1136 of 34 species. Of course, there were changes on the Upper Rock as the summer heat faded; perhaps the most spectacular was the sudden appearance of Southern Autumn Crocus in huge numbers a few days after heavy rain showers. In our last few days, the Paper White Narcissus were just beginning to open; we wonder, did they last until Christmas?

Several apes patrolled the site and it was quickly discovered that they were totally uninterested in the birding activity, happily dodging under the nets and ignoring any birds which may have been caught and were awaiting extraction. The team also became a little complacent over the apes' activities until on one occasion supplies of fruit were stolen from an open rucksack and eaten in full view of the ringing station!

It was agreed by all that the month had been a huge success in gathering data from the chosen area, data which will be compared with results at Jew's Gate. It also provided the team with an opportunity to handle and learn about species not normally seen in the UK: Ortolan Bunting, Subalpine Warber, Hoopoe, Sardian Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff and Orphean Warbler to name just a few. Disappointingly, no birds were caught having previously been ringed in another country, though one Blackcap was caught with a ring which had been put on the bird in September 2011. We were also able to monitor and report the migrating Raptors and sightings were made of Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Short-toed and Booted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Egyptian Vultures and Storks. In all, it was a very successful expedition, well supported by the RAFOS, AOS and RNBWS members who took part. Thanks also to GONHS, especially Charlie Perez and Eric Shaw, to Major Juri Williamson RGR, and the staff in the HQBF Gibraltar MT Section. Hopefully, the data obtained for GONHS and the BTO will be of sufficient value to justify repeating the expedition.

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Plates 53–60. Clockwise from top right: Barbary Ape; Grasshopper Warbler; Pied Flycatcher; Mark Cutts and Nightjar; Nightjar; Sparrowhawk; Redstart; Sardinian Warbler.

Plate 61. Expedition participants, Gambia. © *Jill Hammersley*

Bee-eaters and Rollers - the Gambia, 2–16 December 2013

by James Hammersley

Introduction

The Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) expedition to the Gambia took place from 2–16 December 2013 , with 2 participants from RAFOS and five from the RNBWS. The expedition, organised and led by Group Captain Robin Springett, was supported by funds from both societies. The expedition had two objectives: to introduce participants to bird watching in West Africa in a friendly yet challenging environment, and to carry out a survey of bird species in the vicinity of the Kartong Bird Observatory, with specific attention to over-wintering Nightingales.

With a total area of just 4,361 square miles (smaller than Jamaica) Gambia is the smallest country on the African mainland, with its borders mirroring the meandering Gambia River and less than 30 miles across at its widest point. Apart from the Atlantic Ocean on its western side, The Gambia is completely surrounded by Senegal. 11.5% of the country is water and the Gambia River is tidal, so the water is saline well upriver. We visited remnants of the original Guinea Savanna with its rich forest biodiversity as well other habitats - beaches, mangroves, river banks, wetlands, Sudan savanna, farmland (with many fallow areas) and hotel gardens.

The expedition took place during the November to May dry season and indeed, encountered no rain at all. This season also has lower temperatures with the team experiencing temperatures in the high twenties and low thirties which were certainly bearable and became very pleasant when there was any coastal breeze.

Travel was by privately hired bus and minibus with a very professional driver (Lamin(2)). Two young guides were also used for the majority of the trip; Fatou (one of the few female Gambian bird guides) and Lamin (1), both sharp-eyed and excellent on identification of most species. Lamin (the elder) was used for the first 2 days of the expedition as Fatou was working for a natural history company on those dates. Dinner was taken at local restaurants in the Kotu area or at the up-river camps. The local and excellent Julbrew beer was available and enjoyed at all the venues we stayed at.

Itinerary

The Gambia is a well-known birding destination and many natural history tour companies organize trips to it, often labelling them as a 'taster for Africa'. A jam-packed itinerary in the fourteen days of the expedition allowed the group to experience a great deal of this country and its habitats, and produced a number of birding highlights. The list below notes some of the birds seen amongst the many species we encountered.

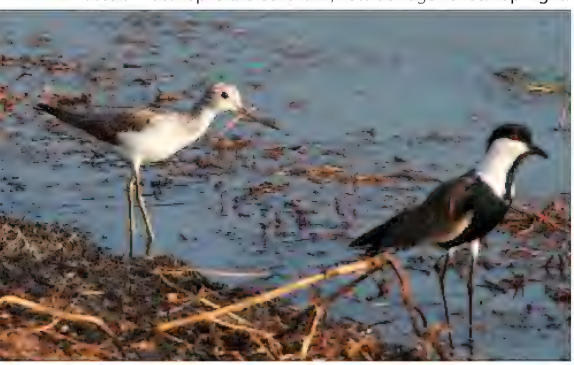
Kotu area (Bokotu Hotel) 4–6 Dec. This included remnant pockets of forest (Guinea Savanna), and cultivated areas interspersed with trees and flat salt pans. During these initial days we visited:

- Kotu Stream, rice paddies and sewerage ponds & Fajara Golf Course - Blue–bellied Roller and African Golden Oriole,
- Tujereng Woods - Lanner Falcon on nest, Bearded Barbet, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.
- Tanji Beach - Kelp Gull, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Little Tern
- Banta Forest - Senegal Parrot, Violet Turaco, Pied Hornbill, White-spotted Flufftail.
- Pirang Shrimp Farm - Mosque Swallow, Pin-tailed Whydah
- Faraba - Banta area - Greyish Eagle Owl, White-throated Bee-eater, Veillot's Barbet.
- Brufut Woods - Greater Honeyguide, Black Woodhoopoe, Grey-headed Bristlebill.
- Wanda Beach Banjul - White-fronted Plover, Sanderling, Curlew.
- Marakissa - Copper Sunbird, Blue-eared Starling, White-crowned Robin Chat.

Plates 62–63. Left: Little Bee-eaters, Kotu Rice Fields. © *S Copsey.* **Right:** Abyssinian Roller. © *S Copsey.*

- En route to Tendaba 7 Dec - we stopped at Banta Rice Paddy to look for Yellow-shouldered Widow Bird and Pirang Shrimp Farm for African Spoonbill. We also tried, unsuccessfully, for Black-faced Firefinch at Bambakono Forest and then went on to Kamapanti, a raptor watch-point, for Ruppell's Griffon Vulture, White-backed Vulture and Gabar Goshawk.
- Tendaba Camp 7 Dec. This was an overnight stop on the way to Georgetown; more basic than the Bokuto hotel with some maintenance requirements notably with the water and lighting. The setting on the Gambia River was superb; good food and beer were available and there was very good birding on the old airfield outside the camp including African Hobby and Lanner in the same tree.
- From Tendaba we continued to Georgetown, where we first birded at Soma and saw Mottled Spinetail and Helmeted Guineafowl. We then took a ferry to the North bank at Ellitenda and doubled back westwards to Kerawa for Northern Carmine bee-eater. Then it was eastwards all the way to Georgetown on the North bank of the Gambia River, birding at Sabaa with Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark and Savile's Bustard, the Kaur wetlands for Egyptian Plover, and the Njan wetlands for African Pygmy Goose (which did not show this time but we saw it later at Kartong).
- Georgetown (Baobalong Camp) 8–9 Dec - again the camp was right on the river and once again there were has some maintenance issues but the food was again very good. On 9 Dec we birded:
  - Jahally Rice Fields - African Hawk Eagle, African Fish Eagle and Black Coucal.
  - Brikamaba - Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Eurasian Griffon Vulture
  - Fulabanta - nesting Jaribu Storks
  - Jaramakut - Little Green Bee-eater
  - Wassu - a colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters and also the Wassu Stone Circles UNESCO World Heritage Site.
  - Kuntaur Ponds - Bruce's Green Pigeon, Dark Chanting Goshawk (again no African Pygmy Goose).

Plates 64–66. **Top left:** Greenshank, Kotu Sewage Ponds. **Top Right:** Grey-headed Gull. **Bottom:** Sandwich Tern. © *All S Copsey*



Plates 67–69. Top left: Beaudouin's snake-eagle, Kartong. **Bottom left:** Exclamatory Paradise Flycatcher. **Right:** Bataleur Eagle. © *Alf S Copsey*

- Gambia River Trip 10 Dec. We travelled from Georgetown upriver for approximately 2 hours and then turned round and went downriver for 4 hours, enjoying good views of 2 pairs of African Finfoot, Western Banded Snake Eagle, European Turtle Dove and Swamp Flycatcher as well as a delicious breakfast.
- Dankunku - en-route back to Tendaba we conducted a long but unsuccessful search for Black Crowned Cranes in this large swampy area, but both Hadada Ibis and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, on donkeys, were present.
- Tendaba Camp 10 & 11 Dec - This was our second stop here as we headed back to the coast. We also birded Kiang West N.P. twice for Senegal Batis, Brown-backed Woodpecker and Pygmy Sunbird, and the savanna area around the camp for Yellow White-eye. On the second day, we enjoyed a boat trip into the mangroves opposite the camp for Goliath Heron, Glossy Ibis, White-backed Night Heron and African Blue Flycatcher
- Kampanti - en-route to the coast, we again tried for raptors and had excellent views of Bataleur Eagle and a Eurasian Griffon Vulture.
- Bambakano - we again tried unsuccessfully for Black-faced Firefinch but did see Violet-backed Sunbird.
- Kartong Bird Observatory (Boboi Lodge) - 12–16 Dec - on the very Southern edge of The Gambia. We took a river trip that actually entered Senegal, and explored the coastal area as well as the wader scrapes, seeing Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Little Stint, Spotted Redshank, Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel; making us feel very much at home. Some netting and ringing took place and use was made of the photographic hide positioned right in front of the reed bed. We also birded the coastal area for Palearctic migrants, seeing Olivaceous Warbler, Melodious Warbler, Subalpine Warbler and a Wryneck.
- Aboku National Park 16 Dec - a remnant forest pocket very close to the airport - Green Turaco, Western Bluebill, Ahanta Francolin, Snowy Capped Robin-Chat. A great way to end the expedition.

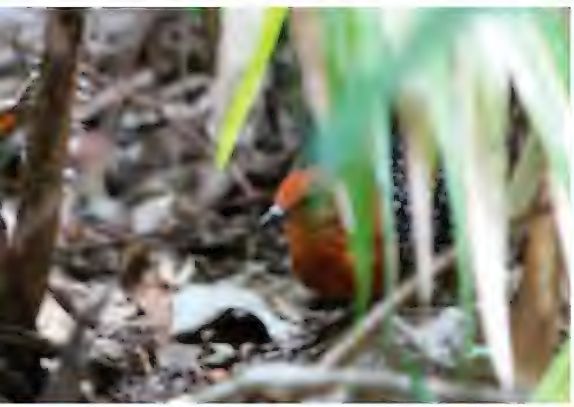
Ornithological Highlights

Two hundred and ninety seven species of birds were seen during the expedition with the vast majority being viewed by all of the participants. There were many highlights to the trip, not least being the overall pleasure of birding in a dry and hot environment during December. Rollers were among the stars of the trip with 4 species seen regularly, but the eight species of bee-eater competed strongly for the accolade of the most dazzling and stunning aerial display. I will only mention a few of the main ornithological delights of the trip:

White-spotted Flufftail - One of nine species of small rails that make up this distinctive genus and most are sexually dimorphic; a rare characteristic in the Rallidae. The White-spotted Flufftail is widespread but like all the others secretive and difficult to see. We were taken to a bench in Banta Forest where the local forest guide, Kawsu, made sure we were sitting comfortably, but keeping very still and quiet. Then he called in the male bird, and within a few minutes it came across the forest path at exactly the predicted spot and then moved onto a small clearing opposite the bench and responded to his calls. It remained for two to three minutes before walking off into the forest undergrowth giving the whole group great views of, for many, their first Flufftail.

Egyptian Plover - this is probably the main species that people come to the Gambia to see, famous for reputedly picking morsels of food from the jaws of crocodiles - hence its other name of 'crocodile bird'. Described as feeding off insects on the ground or those that are low flying, it was still slightly disconcerting for the first sight to be of one feeding off road kill insects 30 metres away. An incredible wader, we were lucky enough to see them at 2 sites on the northern bank, Kaur and the Njan wetlands.

Plates 70–72. **Top left:** White-spotted Flufftail. **Top right:** Carmine Bee-eater. **Bottom:** Egyptian Plover. © *All S Copsey*



Plates 73–75. **Top left:** Nightjar, Kartong Bird observatory. **Bottom left:** Long-tailed Nightjar, Brufut Woods. **Right:** Whinchat, Tujering. © *All S Copsey*

Netting a Long-tailed Nightjar at Kartong Bird Observatory - This is a fairly common and widespread species of African nightjar with a partially migratory northern population, and like many of its close relatives is a splendid looking species; especially in the hand. We had previously seen an individual on the ground at very close quarters at Brufut Woods. At Kartong Bird Observatory, although it was a very blustery night, Colin Cross still netted one for us to view. Unfortunately the individual turned out to be a previously ringed bird, but still a fabulous bird and a great pleasure to see an individual of such a stunning species in the hand.

European Birds in their Winter Quarters - For many birders the highlight of the European year is the sight of returning migrants to their breeding areas in Europe. The Gambia provided a fabulous opportunity to see some of these birds in their winter quarters. We saw many Ospreys, a few Barn Swallows, one European Turtle Dove, six Whinchats, two Redstart, three Subalpine Warblers, one Whitethroat, one Wryneck and three Olivaceous Warblers. Next Spring as the birds return to Europe we will now have a good mental picture of the environment where some of them have spent the Northern winter.

Summary

A highly enjoyable jam-packed two week trip to a small West African country that provided many ornithological highlights within a fantastic environment and superb climate. The geography of the country, virtually surrounded by Senegal, gives it the feel of an island and this together with the 3 river boat trips made the RN contingent feel very much at home. By the way, one of the local bird guides that we used, Fatou Colley, has her own website, in case anyone is tempted to visit the Gambia. It is www.gambiabirding.com

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Plate 76. Breakfast in the Andes.

Two days in the Andes - a welcome break from ship's routine

by Warrant Officer Steve Copsey, *HMS York*
(All photographs taken by the author)

Heading home in the May of 2011, after a busy South Atlantic deployment, *HMS York* sailed north up the Pacific coast, and a four day visit to Callao gave me time for a couple of days birding in the Western Andes. Alan Henry from the Falkland Islands had given me the contact details of Gunnar Engblom who runs birding tours under the name Kolibrie Expeditions. I contacted Gunnar and so it was that at 0400 on 31 May I was picked up outside the port gates by Alejandro and Julio, my bird guide and driver respectively for the two day trip. We drove through the deserted Peruvian Capital, and two hours later Lima was a distant memory as we climbed through the spectacular St Eulalia Valley, gateway into the Andes. Julio stopped the minibus after another hour and Alejandro and I headed off down a small scrubby path for my first taste of Andean birding. Within thirty minutes. Tropical Kingbird, Long-tailed Mockingbird, Croaking-ground Dove and Peruvian Pygmy Owl had all been seen. We returned to the vehicle an hour or so later to find that Julio had knocked up a breakfast of bread and omelettes washed down by superb Peruvian Coffee.

Plates 77–78 (opposite). Top: Andean Flicker; Bottom: Andean Goose.

After a few more hours driving we were just short of 3000 metres and at this altitude I could certainly feel the lack of air whenever Alejandro and I left the vehicle and went off searching for birds. Hummingbirds appeared to be plentiful at this altitude with Purple-collared Woodstars, Black-breasted Hillstars, Green-tailed Trainbearer and Peruvian Sheartail all making the trip list. The birds looked just as spectacular as their names suggest, but alas they were far from easy to photograph. Each stop throughout the drive continued to add new birds to my list - Streaked Spinetail, Black-necked Woodpecker and Great Inca Finch to name just three. Mountain Parakeet also made its way into the notebook, for we came across a small flock later in the afternoon. This is the only member of the parrot family on this side of the Andes so again it was a species I was very glad to see. We also added Golden-bellied Grosbeak, Rusty-bellied Brush-finch and Pied-crested Tit-tyrant before the day's end. Just as daylight began to fall we stopped at the mountain village of Huachupampa. Julio and Alejandro had a pre-dinner nap at our hotel, so I popped out to the local shop cum bar for a bottle of Peruvian light refreshment.

Plates 79–80. Top: Croaking Ground Doves; **Bottom:** Peruvian Pygmy Owl.

Plates 81–82. Top: Plain-breasted Earthcreeper; **Bottom:** Peruvian Pied-crested Tit-tyrant.

We were up at five the following morning and in the vehicle a few minutes later. The drive along narrow mountain ledges - allegedly called roads - made the experience all the more memorable. The sun rose over the mountains an hour or so later and we stopped for the first time at a small Polylepis Forest. This stunted woodland occurs at around 4000 metres and this habitat is only found in the Andes. We found some cracking birds here: Black Metaltail, Shining Sunbeam and Giant Hummingbird. We left Julio and climbed into the forest and again I had trouble getting air into my lungs as we walked. Fortunately, on the frequent rest breaks we came across more specialities in the form of Striped-headed Antpitta and Plain-breasted Earthcreeper. Unfortunately we missed White-cheeked Cotinga, another Polylepis speciality, but we made up for it with good views of Mountain Caracara, Puna Hawk, Peruvian Sierra-finch and White-capped Dipper.

Plate 83. Peruvian barlady, Huachupampa.

After we left the Polylepis Forest we climbed to our highest point of the trip at an altitude of 4900 metres. The air was thin but thankfully we were in more of what I would call upland (Puna) lakes and flats, so the walking was all pretty much on the level. It was in this habitat that we came across quite a few new bird species including Andean Gull and Andean Goose, the latter in good numbers. A small flock of Ibis which flew over were identified as Puna Ibis and we also heard many Puna Tinamous calling higher up in the mountains. Several species of Ground-Tyrants were found; Cinereous, Puna and White-fronted being the most common. Also nice to see several Andean Flickers displaying to each other among the rocks. This member of the woodpecker family had a yaffling call quite similar to our own Green Woodpecker. It was also in this location that we had our best views of Andean Condor. Although a little distant, a single adult spiralled over the mountainous terrain.

All too soon it was time to head back down to the coast. These two fantastic days of birding in the Andes will live long in the memory

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Obituary

Major Michael Gallagher, MBE, FRGS, 1922–2014

by Michael Casement

Michael Gallagher died peacefully on 27th July just short of his 93rd birthday in a nursing home in Chichester. He was a staunch supporter of RNBWS for over 30 years and our local representative in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea from 1982 to 1996.

Leaving school aged 18 at the outbreak of war he joined the Army, and was commissioned into the RASC. He served throughout the war, with the 8th Army in Egypt and Italy until late 1943, followed by involvement in Normandy in July 1944. After the war his many postings included Palestine, Gibraltar, Christmas Island, Aden, British Guyana, Bahrain and Sharjah and from these he began developing his lifelong hobby of natural history, into a thorough knowledge of fauna and flora in desert areas. Following a year on Christmas Island in the late 50s, where he founded and became Secretary of the Christmas Island NHS, he produced his first published papers. Whilst in Sharjah and Bahrain in 1968 and 1973 he led several scientific groups into the desert, discovering new species of bats, mammals, beetles, plants and insects, and in early 1975 he led the first Oman Flora & Fauna Survey, being subsequently elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Retiring in 1976, he then embarked on his second and more memorable career, unhindered by army duties. He led several more surveys to Oman, and became an advisor on the country's wildlife and natural history. In 1981 he was employed as advisor and founder/curator of the Natural History Museum of Oman. His influence had a major impact on the conservation and knowledge base of the region and it is for this that he will be best remembered. He made major discoveries there, and by the mid 90's he had 30 different species bearing his name, *gallagheri*. He was awarded the Zoological Society of London's

Plate 84. Michael Gallagher. © *photographer*

Stamford Raffles Award in 1983, and in 1993 the New Years Honours List the MBE "for services to wildlife conservation in Oman"; in 1995 he was elected Fellow of the Linnean Society of London.

Michael first came to notice of RNBWS (in the person of Bill Bourne) for his work in Christmas Island, and his encyclopaedic local knowledge made him an ideal contact for ships visiting the Gulf. I was Chairman at the time, and Michael readily accepted my invitation to become the RNBWS local area representative. He was always generous with his time and advice and Bill Bourne, Stephen Chapman and I regularly consulted him about unusual identifications for our annual *Sea Swallow* analyses of seabird and landbirds. He impressed all visitors to his museum with his meticulous attention to detail, and his memorable birding trips into the local deserts.

Michael's *Birds of Oman* (published in 1980), magnificently illustrated by Martin Woodcock, became the standard reference

for the area, and is cited frequently in *Sea Swallow.* He was a prolific author contributing papers to numerous journals including *Ibis, Bull BOC, Sandgrouse* and he also edited *The Gulf Birdwatchers' Newsletter* from 1961 to 1971. His 1985 paper *Seabirds of the Kuria Muria Islands, Arabian Sea* (*Sea Swallow* 34:5–15) is well worth re-reading.

Retiring again in 1998, aged 80, after over 20 years in Oman, he returned to his family home in Pagham, where I came to know him in person. His interest in RNBWS activities and his passion for Oman and nature conservation did not cease. I often visited Pagham with him and other birdwatching friends and, until he suffered a stroke in 2010, he frequently joined us for guided tours around the area.

Michael was a unique and talented naturalist, a special friend, and will be sadly missed by his many RNBWS and Omani colleagues.

Michael Casement
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Arabian images; Plates 85–86. Top: Kentish Plover. **Bottom:** Caspian Tern, Western Reef Egret and Slender-billed Gull. © *Howard King*

Notes on seabird reports received 2013

by Stephen Chapman

We are most grateful for the in-depth analysis and reports by Captain Neil Cheshire over 18 years: 1990–1995 and 2002–2013. This year's report follows the changes put in place by Neil. It aims to be concise, list all observers and their voyages, and capture highlights of their sightings. It concentrates on observations of rare and seldom reported species; observations from areas rarely visited; large concentrations of birds; reports of evidence of migration and reports of unusual behaviour and feeding observations. The taxonomy follows the Revised RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds (2013).

David Ballance's notes of voyages on *MV Black Watch* from Dover to ports in Greenland and Iceland and return were held over from last year and reveal a fascinating insight to the seabirds of these high latitudes. The ship, small by modern cruise ship standards is well equipped for observing seabirds, with a continuous promenade deck and an excellent forward lounge on top of the bridge which proved useful during the heavy weather encountered. In an exemplary manner David divided his time into sections of up to three hours recording all seabirds according to RNBWS conventions. Compared with a very similar Icelandic voyage in August 2009, when he saw a total of 730 Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, David reports this voyage produced only 166, half of those seen on one day close to the Greenland coast, including 40 on one iceberg. Many factors of course can affect the distribution of pelagic birds and one should not draw general conclusions from spot observations except to say that it is consistent with observations from the Norwegian coast where the population size of Kittiwakes has decreased dramatically. It is now listed as 'endangered' on the Norwegian Red List. The decline is mainly related to reduced food availability caused by altered environmental conditions.

Simon Cook continues to be a very busy seabird observer. On board *MV Plancius* in May he provided an interesting insight from an area off West Africa not often visited by commercial or naval shipping, and later in June and July went north to the Greenland Basin to the drift ice. August and September found Simon on board *MV Boreal* sailing from Reykjavik to Quebec City, and then went on to work as a staff member on *MV L'Austral* during three voyages from Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula, amassing sightings of albatrosses and penguins, and cetaceans.

The type of work in which *HMS Protector* engages provides opportunities for seabird recording and good photo opportunities. Both Tony Tindale and Steve Copsey took advantage here and submitted exemplary records on Excel spreadsheets which will make it easy to upload the data to the online database. Steve's data will appear in the 2014 report.

Lieutenant Philip Boak of *HMS Echo* sent in some useful records during a voyage from UK to Dubai, and I look forward to more from him in the future

Thomas Johannsen sent interesting reports from a voyage between Australia, Sri Lanka and the Gulf.

From Kerala, India, S. Prasanth Narayanan and friends took a fishing vessel to sea from Alappuzha, also known as Alleppey, a town south of Cochin. The seas off India are receiving much greater attention these days, as the article elsewhere in this issue of Sea Swallow shows.

Our thanks go to these observers for their systematic records.

Observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2013 unless otherwise noted. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude. nm = nautical miles (1.852 km), Ad = Adult, h = hour(s), imm = immature, C = census sheets, R=report sheets.

Table 1.

David K. Ballance (DKB) August 2011. 20R	*m.v. Black Watch*	Dover to ports in Greenland and Iceland and return,
Lt Philip R. Boak (PRB)	*HMS Echo*	UK to Dubai, May–October 2013, 2R
Simon G. Cook (SGC)	*m.v. Plancius*	Cape Verde Islands and West Africa pelagic cruise to Madeira, May 2013; Netherlands to Spitzbergen and cruises offshore June–July 2013. 8R
	m.v. Le Boreal	Reykjavik, Iceland to Quebec City, Canada, August to September 2013. 10R
	m.v. L'Austral	Three voyages from Ushuaia to Antarctic Peninsula, November–December 2013. 7R
Capt.Thomas Johannsen (TJ)	*m.v. Trina Oldendorff*	Geelong to Galle, Sri Lanka; Jebel Ali to Kuwait, March–April 2013. 2C
S. Prasanth Narayanan, Toms Augustine and Jinesh P.S. (SPN)	Fishing Vessel	Pelagics off Thaikal, (Alappuzha), August 2013. 1R on Excel
WEO Tony Tindale (TT)	*HMS Protector*	Falklands, South Georgia and South Atlantic, northwards to Barbados, thence to English Channel, March–May 2013, 19R on Excel. South Atlantic, December 2013. 3R on Excel

PENGUINS *Spheniscidae*

Emperor Penguin *Aptenodytes forsteri* . On 26 Nov in the northern part of the Weddell Sea SGC noted an adult on pack ice at 63.6S, 56.2W, a few miles south of Paulet Island. It went into the water at the approach on the ice of a predatory Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*. **Gentoo Penguin** *Pygoscelis papua*. Colony of 200 south of Mare Harbour, Falklands 12 Mar (TT). **Adélie Penguin** *Pygoscelis adeliae.* Single leucistic bird on Paulet Island, as above. **Rockhopper Penguin** *Eudyptes chrysocome/moseleyi* . In voyages around the Drake Passage and Antarctica SGC recorded: 28 Nov, 4 at 58.8S, 65.2W, 184' SSE of Cape Horn, sea surface 2°C; 1 Dec in the northern Drake Passage, 3 ad 1 imm 57.2S, 64.5W; 9 Dec to the east of Cape Horn, at 55.6S, 65.9W and 2 at 55.6S, 66.0W; 3 with 2 **Magellanic Penguins** *Spheniscus magellanicus* at 55.2S, 66.3W; 18 Dec, mid-Drake Passage, 3 near Humpback Whales *Megaptera novaeangliae* at 59.2S, 62.6W, south of the Antarctic Convergence (sea temperature 0.7°C), and a single **Macaroni Penguin** *Eudyptes chrysolophus at* 58.9S, 62.9W.

ALBATROSSES *Diomedeidae*

Wandering (Snowy) Albatross *Diomedea exulans* On 29 Mar TJ reported 1 imm at 38.7S, 140.6E. In the South Atlantic TT saw 1–3 birds daily north to 36.5S, 35.5W on 1 Apr when 3 Ad were following in the wake. **Southern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea epomophora* SGC noted singletons on 9 Dec to the east of Cape Horn, 55.6S, 65.9W; 11 Dec at 56.8S, 64.9W; 18 Dec at 58.7S, 63.0W and 1 Feb northern Drake Passage at 57.0S, 64.7W and at 58.6S, 63.7W. **Northern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea sanfordi* SGC reported the only sighting of this species at 56.4S 65.3W on 11 Dec. **Grey-headed Albatross** *Thalassarche chrysostoma*. On northward passage TT noted the last singleton at 45.8, 35.8W on 30 Mar. SGC had frequent encounters in the Drake Passage but not elsewhere in Nov/Dec. **Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross** *Phoebetria palpebrata* TT noted 2 on 13 Mar at 52.8S, 52.1W and noted ones and twos around South Georgia in March. Exceptionally SGC encountered at least 13 on 21 Nov at 58.2S, 63.5W with the birds staying around all day. On 28 Nov at 59.2S, 64.9W 5 Ad and 2 imm were noted; on 1 Dec at 56.7S, 65.0W 5 ad; otherwise singletons were more usual in Drake Passage.

FULMARS *Fulmarinae*

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. On 14 Jun SGC recorded 5,000+ south of Jan Mayen and similar numbers on 18 Aug SW of Greenland at 63.2N, 51.4W; and again 4–5,000 on 10 Sep in the Hudson Strait of which 2–3,000 were following a trawler. On

21 Aug 2011 DKB recorded rates of 38–116/h through the day south of Iceland around 62N, 28W with at least 17 (2.4%) dark morphs (blue phase). Also on 24 Aug DKB recorded 27–34/h during the day, NNW of Rockall. WNW of the Outer Hebrides DKB noted how trawlers are a magnet for these petrels with 2,700 following two small vessels next day at 56.6N, 9.3W. **Blue Petrel** *Halobaena caerulea*. 13 on 1 Dec at 56.6S, 65W (SGC). **Cape Petrel** *Daption capense* In the southern Drake Passage SGC noted 300+ in an hour's watch on 2 Dec, and 100+ further north at 60.1N, 61.6W. **Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii*. On 6 May off Cape Verde Is at 16.7N, 24.1W SGC saw 17, 2 on sea with 1 of 3 **Fea's Petrel** *Pterodroma feae* as ship slowed approaching Sperm Whales *Physeter macrocephalus*. Off Gomera (27.7N 17.2W) on 10 May SGC counted 23 in the forenoon watch and 9 in the afternoon. Looking out on 12 May approaching the Desertas yielded 24 on the morning watch. **Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera*. An expected bird on 1 Apr at 36.4, 35.4W and a more northerly sighting (TT) at 26.9S, 34.1W. **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis*. Returning north from the Southern Ocean TT noted single birds from 50S on 29 Mar to 4 Apr at 26.9S 34.1W. **Jouanin's Petrel** *Bulweria fallax*. On 21 Sep south of Oman PRB noted singletons in flight close to the surface at 15.7N, 56.0E and on 23 Sep at 17.2N, 59.9E.

SHEARWATERS *Procellariinae*

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. Reported in the Southern Ocean during March, and **Spectacled Petrel** *Procellaria conspicillata* at 37S, 35.5W on 1 Apr then daily sightings, often following, north into the tropics at 22.2S, 34.2W (3 birds) on 5 Apr (TT). **Sooty Shearwater** *Ardenna grisea*. Off Greenland at 55.7N, 30.0W DKB saw 2 singletons on 14 Aug 2011. **Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Ardenna carneipes*. From a fishing boat off Alleppey SPN and colleagues found this shearwater the most numerous seabird with groups of up to 50 on 18 Aug. On 2 Oct PRB noted 5 at 24.2N, 52.2E. **Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis*. SE of Cape Farewell at 58N 43W DKB reported 30–40/h on 15 Aug 2011; 20/h on 18 Aug at 59N, 47W; 36/h on 19 Aug at 57.6N, 42.6W; 30–60/h on 20 Aug during the day from 58.4N, 37.2W to 59.7N, 34.9W; and just 3/h on 21 Aug at 61.9N, 29.3W; and finally 3 singletons on 24 Aug at 60.4N, 19.5W. SGC noted 2 at 60.1N, 42.6W on 16 Aug and 5 in Belle Isle Strait at 51.9N, 55.8W on 13 Sep. **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris borealis*. Tropical sightings were reported by TT at 4.8N, 48W on 13 Apr (2); at 6.7N, 50.7W on 14 Apr (2); and 1 at 11.2N, 56.9W on 16 Apr. SGC noted a gathering of 10,000+ off Salvagen Grande in the evening of 11 May as *Plancius* cruised around the island. Off the eastern end of Madeira SGC noted c.2,500 on 13 May**. Cape Verde Shearwater** *Calonectris edwardsii* . SGC reported 17 on 6 May at 16.7N, 24.1W. **Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus.* In the western South Atlantic TT noted a single flock of 80 at 38.5S, 55.7W on 14 Dec. SGC noted 6 on 15 Aug at 63N,28.4W and 3 on 15 Sep at 49.1N, 64.3W. **Audubon's Shearwater** *Puffinus lherminieri.* A singleton on 17 Apr at 13.2N 59.9W and on 19 Apr at 13.2N 60.0W, west of Barbados (TT). **Boyd's Shearwater** *Puffinus boydi*. 1 on 6 May at 16.7N, 24.1W (SGC). **Madeiran [Barolo] Shearwater** *Puffinus baroli*. TT noted a single bird in flight described with brownish upperparts and compared to a Manx seen later that was noticeably longer winged, on 3 May at 40.3N, 30.6W. Off the eastern end of Madeira SGC noted 6 on 13 May. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*. TT reported a total of 6 at South Georgia on 28 Mar which he ascribes as the Subantarctic species but without supporting notes.

DIVING-PETRELS *Pelecanoididae*

No positive identifications to species level.

STORM-PETRELS *Hydrobatidae*

Southern Storm-petrels *Oceanitinae*

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. Off Mauritania at 20.3N, 17.7W SGC noted 349 on 8 May. On 18 Aug off SW India SPN noted small numbers at 9.7N, 76.3E. **White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*. Off Western Sahara at 24.2N, 16.6W on 9 May SGC counted 123 including groups of 73 and 33. Approaching Selvagem Pequeña SGC noted 40 on 11 May. TT reported 4 at 40.3S, 52.1W on 21 Dec. **Black-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta tropica*. In the southern Drake Passage SGC saw 3 at 61.5S, 60.2W on 22 Nov and 2 at 60.1S, 61.6W on 18 Dec. In the high latitudes of the South Atlantic TT reported a series of single birds during December: 24th 51.9S, 40.3W and 52.6S, 39.4W; 26th 6 birds 55.6S, 29.3W; 27th 57.5S, 28.8W and 58.5S,

27.1W; 28th 58.5S, 23.3W; **White-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta grallaria*. TT reported a single bird at 37.3S, 35.6W on 1 Apr.

Northern Storm-petrels *Hydrobatinae*
European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Whilst DKB spent many hours watching in northern latitudes in August 2011 his only reports of this species were single birds at 56.6N, 9.3W on 25th and at 50.4N 6.0W on 26 Aug. **Leach's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. SGC saw 18 at 18.2N, 20.4W on 7 May. In often birdless equatorial waters TT had two sightings of single birds on 11 Apr at 1.1S, 40.0W and 0.1S, 41.4W.

TROPICBIRDS *Phaethontidae*

Red-billed Tropic-bird *Phaethon aethereus*. In the Gulf of Aden PRB saw 2 at 14.9N, 52.8E on 1 Aug. Off Raso Island, in the Cape Verde Islands SGC noted 6 on 6 May. In the equatorial Atlantic at 3.9N, 46.8W TT saw 1 on 13 Apr.

GANNETS & BOOBIES *Sulidae*

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*. After passing the Lizard westbound DKB noted 104 Ad (42/h) and a singleton immature on 12 Aug 2011; singleton adults at 62.0N, 28.9W and 62.5N. 27.6W on 21 Aug 2011; 26 Ad (10/h) at 64.1N, 22.5W on 23 Aug 2011; mainly adults at c.20/h from 51.2N, 6.0W, rounding Lands End to 49.8N, 4.8W and 60/h off Salcombe at 50.1N, 3.2W on 26 Aug 2011. Off Western Sahara towards the southerly limit of its range at 24.2N, 16.6W SGC noted 68 (17/h) on 9 May. **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra*. Coming north from high latitudes TT first noted a singleton Ad at 6.7S, 34.5W on 9 Apr. In the Gulf of Aden PRB saw single birds at 19.3N, 62.1E on 24 Aug; 22.0N, 65.0E on 25 Aug; and 2 at 23.8N, 61.4E on 26 Aug. **Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula*. Coming north from high latitudes TT first noted a brown morph bird successfully taking flying fish at 18.3S, 34.3W on 6 Apr. A brown morph bird at 10.3S, 34.4W crashed into the foc'sle mast and fell to deck where it was unable to take off. Tony went to assist and discovered the booby's last meal was two flying fish.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES *Scolopacidae*

One phalarope unidentified as to species in flight SW of Ireland at 55.2N, 26.8W on 14 Aug 2011 (DKB).

Red (Grey) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Off Western Sahara at 24.2N, 16.6W SGC noted 16 (two were in breeding plumage) on 9 May. **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*. One in Strait of Belle Isle at 51.9N, 55.8W on 13 Sep; close views of 6 leaving Sisimuit at 66.9N, 54.2W on 6 Sep; and again close views of 15 8' offshore in the Hudson Strait at 61.3N, 65.2W on 10 Sep; group 25 on sea before taking wing in the St Lawrence at 48.4N, 69.2W on 16 Sep (SGC). In the tropical waters of Indonesia the birds were found to be common with 600–1,000 from a boat between Soligi and Jikotamo (1.5S, 127.5E) in Mar 2010 (M Thibault *et al.*, 2013).

SHEATHBILLS *Chionidae*

Yellow-billed Sheathbill *Chionis albus*. At Husvik Bay, South Georgia on 18 Mar TT recovered a bird dead from rat poison, and noted another alive on the pier at Husvik on 24 Mar.

SKUAS & JAEGERS *Stercorariidae*

Chilean Skua *Stercorarius chilensis*. Singleton approaching Beagle Channel at 55.2S, 66.3W on 29 Nov (SGC). **South Polar Skua** *Stercorarius mccormicki*. 13 in S Gerlache Strait at 64.5S, 62.5W on 3 Dec; and 2 SE of Cape Horn at 59.9S, 61.8W on 18 Dec (SGC).

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*. 3 together flying S off C Farewell at 57N, 39.2W on 15 Aug 2011; and a singleton at 58.4N, 37.2W on 20th Aug (DKB). Off Mauritania 14 (2/h) at 20.3N, 17.7W on 8 May (SGC). Multiple sightings of individuals and groups <10 during a voyage from Reykjavik to Quebec City including Baffin Is (north to 73N, 77W) and Labrador Sea 14 Aug–19 Sept (SGC).

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*. Two together flying SE off Greenland at 59.4N, 34.9W on 20 Aug 2011 and total of 9 flying SE during the day at 62/1N, 28.9W on 21 Aug 2011 (DKB). Off Mauritania 109 (18/h) at 20.3N, 17.7W on 8 May (SGC). A noteworthy paper with stunning photographs describing spring migrations overland by Dr R Wynn and others was published in *British Birds*, 107: 220–228.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. From a fishing boat off Alleppey, SPN and colleagues reported total of 6 at 9.7N, 76.3W on 18 Aug.

GULLS *Laridae*

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*. Off Greenland DKB noted 4 Ad and 2 imm at 60.5N, 46.2W, then 50 in Quaqortoq Harbour on 26 Aug 2011. **Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus.* Off Greenland DKB noted 1 Ad at 60.5N, 46.2W on 26 Aug 2011. When stationary in drift ice in the Arctic Ocean on 21 Jun SGC noted 3 (12 Ad and 2 imm) at 79.9N, 13.6E and on 30 Jun 14 at 80.3N, 15.1E. **Laughing Gull** *Leucophaeus atricilla*. One west of Barbados at 13.2N, 59.9W on 17 Apr. **Sabine's Gull** *Xema sabini*. Off Mauritania 17 (4/h) at 19.5N, 17.5W and 230 (40/h) at 20.3N, 17.7W on 8 May; and next day off Western Sahara 24 (6/h) and 7 (4/h) at 24.2N, 16.6W (SGC). During a high latitude voyage in Aug–Sept SGC noted a single Sabine's after leaving Sisimuit on 6 Sep at 66.9N 54.2W.

TERNS *Sterninae*

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. Off Alleppey SPN and colleagues noted 36 and tropical species of terns, on 18 Aug. **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*. Off Greenland DKB noted a group of 30 at 55.8N, 30.6W on 14 Aug 2011. Off Mauritania at 19.5N, 17.5W SGC noted 15 on 8 May and off Western Sahara at 23.2N, 17.0W also 15 on 9th. **Antarctic Tern** *Sterna vittata*. In addition to much smaller numbers around South Georgia, over vegetated foreshore at Cumberland East Bay TT counted at least 100 on 26 Mar. **Black Tern** *Childonias niger.* Off Western Sahara at 24.2N, 16.3W on 9 May SGC noted 52.

ALCIDS *Alcidae*

Little Auk *Alle alle*. In Baffin Bay at 70.6N, 68.5W SGC saw 35 on 2 Sep and 28 (8 in non-breeding plumage) in the Labrador Sea at 56.3N, 59.0W on 12 Sep. **Thick-billed Murre** *Uria lomvia* . Off Jan Mayen at 70.9N, 9.0W SGC recorded 300+ (150+/h) on 16 Jun. Stationary in drift ice at 80.8N, 20.2E on 15 Jul SGC noted 98 birds, and 229 (45/h) in the Labrador Sea at 56.3N, 59.0W on 12 Sep. **Black Tystie** *Cepphus grylle*. Stationary in drift ice at 80.8N, 20.2E on 15 Jul SGC noted 82, and 4 in the Belle Isle Strait at 51.9N, 55.8W on 13 Sep. **Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*. Off Cape Farewell at 57.8N, 41.7W DKB noted 57 (28/h) and at 58.2N, 43.9W (21/h) on 15 Aug 2011. SW of Iceland at 62.1N, 28.9W DKB noted 15 on 21 Aug 2011.

References

Thibault, M. *et al*., 2013. New and interesting records for the Obi archipelago. *Bull. B.O.C.* 133(2): 83–115.

Acknowledgement

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Landbirds from ships at sea

by Lieutenant Chris Patrick RN

Reports of land birds at sea came from the following observers:

Simon Cook (SCo) - m.v. *Le Boreal*, Reykjavik, Iceland to Quebec City, Canada, August to September 2013
WO1 Steve Copsey (SCC) - *HMS Protector*, UK to Ascension Island, September 2012
Lt Chris Patrick (CP) - Red Sea and Mediterranean, January to March 2013 and *HMS Illustrious* in UK waters, April 2013, then UK to the Persian Gulf, August to November 2013
WO1 Tony Tindall (ADT) - *HMS Protector*, South Atlantic and Caribbean, April 2013

NORTH ATLANTIC (EAST OF 30°W) & BAY OF BISCAY

On 20 Sep 12 SCC recorded a Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* on board 130NM west of Portugal, at 41 19N 011 18W, in a light NE wind. Three days later at 27 19N 016 27W, 50NM south of Tenerife, there were 3 Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus,* a Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica,* and a Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* onboard in mid-afternoon. Two hours later these were joined by 3 Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata*. On the evening of 26 Sep, a European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* arrived onboard while the ship was 90NM west of Dakar, at 14 39N 018 50W.

ENGLISH CHANNEL, NORTH SEA, IRISH SEA, NORWEGIAN SEA & BALTIC

In the North Sea, 40NM east of the Firth of Forth, CP had a European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* and 2 Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* onboard during the afternoon of 15 Apr 13.

NORTH ATLANTIC (WEST OF 30°W)

On 20 Aug 13 in Disko Bay, Central West Greenland, SCo witnessed up to 10 Northern Ravens *Corvus corax principalis* at a time, flying to and from floating ice including 2 sitting on icebergs, 4.5NM from shore. They were following local fisherman who frequently gut fish and seals out on the ice.

On 22 Aug whilst 5.5NM off the Greenland coast, at 65 45N 053 33W, a juvenile Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* flew over the ship. Two days later at 67 52N 054 08W, 6NM from the coast, a fine black-spotted white Gyr Falcon flew around the ship. In the Coronation Fjord area of Baffin Island, at 67 22N 063 15W, a third Gyr Falcon, this time a dark individual, crossed in front of the ship.

In a strong westerly wind on 10 Sep 13, SCo observed a Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* onboard 8NM off the west coast of Resolution Island, 61 22N 065 21W, and

Plate 87. African Sacred Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbill on board *HMS Echo*, Arabian Sea. © *P Boak*

remain with the ship all afternoon until it reached the eastern end of Hudson Strait. Also that afternoon 3 Common Redpolls *Carduelis flammea* flew round the ship calling and in the evening, with gale force winds, a Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* was seen in flight several times. The following day 2 more Buff-bellied Pipits were onboard but flew off at first light while the ship was 2NM inside Nachvak Fjord, Labrador, 59 02N 063 44W.

A female Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* was watched onboard for 30 minutes on the afternoon of 13 Sep at 51 32N 056 33W in the middle of the Strait of Belle Isle. Surprisingly it was seen again in the same place on the ship the following morning at 49 36N 058 00W where, in dark and rainy conditions with a moderate ENE wind, 30+ small passerines were observed flying past the ship, some calling. That afternoon a Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* and a Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum* landed on the ship at 49 20N 059 23W, 40NM offshore in the Esquiman Channel, Gulf of St. Lawrence, in a strong SE wind. Approaching Perce, Quebec, 48 38N 063 42W, early on the morning of 15 Sep, a Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* flew past calling.

On 16 Sep in the St. Lawrence River, 48 17N 069 25W, a Merlin *Falco columbarius* with a full crop flew over the ship and later a Buff-bellied Pipit was seen 2 miles offshore from Tadoussac, Quebec. As the ship approached the dock in Quebec City on 18 Sep, a Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* flew across the river.

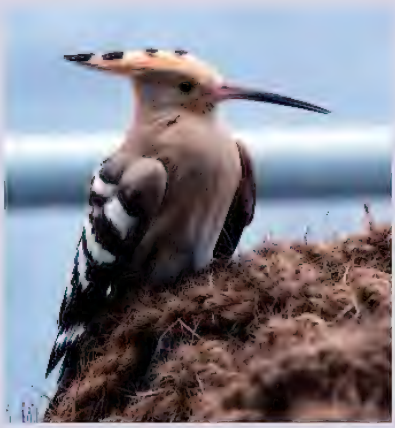

Plate 88. Hoopoe on board *HMS Echo*, Arabian Sea. © *P Boak*

GULF OF MEXICO & CARIBBEAN

On 17 Apr 13 whilst 18NM west of Barbados, ADT had a Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* onboard, at 13 14N 059 56W.

MEDITERRANEAN

A male Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and an adult Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* were seen by CP on 21 Mar 13, 40NM north of the Egyptian coast. On 23 Mar, as the ship passed between Libya and Greece, a contact moving steadily north on the navigational radar turned out to be a high flying flock of 20 White Storks *Ciconia ciconia.*

In the Ionian Sea on 27 Aug, CP had a White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* at 37 54N 017 00E. A European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur* was onboard off the coast of Albania, 40 30N 19 00E, on 30 Aug.

When the ship was 35NM north of the Nile Delta, at 31 54N 31 30E, on 9 Sep a European Turtle-dove, 2 Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* and 3 Lesser Whitethroats *Sylvia curruca* arrived onboard at around 1100.

RED SEA & GULF OF ADEN

On 29 Jan 13, in the Gulf of Aden near Djibouti, CP recorded a Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* onboard. Two days later in the same area a House Crow *Corvus splendens* arrived on the ship and remained onboard, mainly on the main mast, for 2 days before flying off north. On 15 Feb, off the coast of Somalia, a Hoopoe *Upupa epops* spent a couple of hours resting onboard.

In the central Red Sea, at 20 24N 038 30E, 100NM south southwest of Jeddah, on 17 Mar singles of Hoopoe and Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* were onboard and a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* was an unexpected migrant moving from Africa to Arabia. It perched briefly on the mast before flying off north only to return and circle the ship 15 minutes later before heading off north again.

On the morning of 12 Sep in the northern Red Sea, 26 36N 035 12E, CP found a Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* and a melanistic Eurasian Reed-warbler onboard. An African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea* was onboard at 17 12N 38 30E, in the central Red Sea, on 14 Sep. The following day, at 17 12N 40 24E, a Rufous-tailed Scrub-

Plate 89. Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin. © *C Patrick*

robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* and a European Turtle-dove were onboard at midday and second European Turtle-dove, a Barn Swallow and a White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* arrived later that afternoon.

A Eurasian Scops-owl *Otus scops* was picked up off of the deck and taken into care in the Gulf of Aden on 19 Sep. The story of its recuperation in CP's cabin and subsequent release was widely reported in the media - www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/oct/01/owl-refuge-hms-illustrious-eurasion-scops. On the same day a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* was also onboard.

On 10 Nov a black phase Western Reef-egret *Egretta gularis* landed on the flight deck ramp and a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* arrived seemingly exhausted, but it soon regained its strength and continued its passage south across the Gulf of Aden. Another Eurasian Scops-owl was found on 11 Nov. It was provided with water and was released a few hours later. It flew off strongly towards Somalia, which was clearly visible to the south. Amazingly a third Eurasian Scops-owl was found the following day. This was a more rufous bird than the previous day's one. Unfortunately it was badly injured and had to be humanely dispatched.

PERSIAN GULF & GULF OF OMAN

In the Gulf of Oman, at 24 30N 057 00E, on 25 Sep 13 CP had a single Eurasian Collared-dove *Streptopelia decaocto* onboard. Three days later in the same area another Eurasian Collared-dove arrived overnight along with an Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* and a female Menetries' Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*. Still in the same area at dawn on 28 Sep, 2 male European Nightjars *caprimulgus europaeus* were found roosting on the quarterdeck. These were the first of 9 to be seen on *HMS Illustrious* over the following 5 weeks.

Plates 90–91. Blue–cheeked Bee-eater. © *C Patrick*

Plate 92. Menetries' Warbler. © *C Patrick*

In the southern Persian Gulf, 24 40N 052 28E, 2 female/immature European Nightjars were seen on 3 Oct with different single females/immatures present on the following 2 mornings. In the same area a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and a Lesser Whitethroat were early morning visitors on 7 Oct. On 23 Oct, back in the Gulf of Oman at 23 00N 059 30E a male European Nightjar roosted all day on a flight deck netting stanchion.

Plate 93. Isabelline Shrike. © *C Patrick*

INDIAN OCEAN & ARABIAN SEA

During a 3 ship RAS on 22 Sep 13, 50NM off the southeast coast of Oman, CP observed a male Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* flying around and perching on the various vessels. A White Wagtail was present on 24 Oct, at 19 30N 058 30E, 50NM east of Oman.

On 2 Nov at 21 36N 60 48E, 80NM off the coast of Oman a female Desert Wheatear and a female/immature European Nightjar were onboard at first light. The following morning in the same area a White Wagtail was present at dawn and at 1000 was joined by singles of European Nightjar (female/immature), female Desert Wheatear, Barn Swallow, 1st winter Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

On 1 Apr 13 a foolish Cattle Egret was seen onboard by ADT at 38 06S 35 37W, 1150NM east of Argentina and 1100NM north of South Georgia, the nearest land. It was last seen the following lunchtime in a very weak state.

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New and interesting bird records from the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)

by Peter Carr

(All photographs taken by the author, except when captioned otherwise)

Introduction

A provisional checklist of the birds of BIOT was published in Sea Swallow 60 in 2011 (Carr, 2011a). It was largely based upon the seminal 1971 work by RNBWS member Dr WRP Bourne, updated with records since then. This short article aims to update the 2011 BIOT bird checklist with records of new species and to publish further records of vagrants, interesting sightings and breeding information that have become available since 2011.

The majority of records are of personal observations (PC) from Diego Garcia made between Jan. 2011–Feb. 2013, with further observations made as a participant in the Chagos Scientific Research Expeditions of March and November 2012, March 2013 and April 2014.

Where any doubt existed about the identity of a rare or new bird, photographs were taken when possible and passed to experts for their opinion. In the case of the majority of the following records, this was RNBWS long-standing member Capt Neil Cheshire (NC). Further advice was provided by Dr. Charles Anderson (CA), a marine scientist working out of the Maldives, who has worked on the birds there and conducted research in the Chagos Archipelago.

Nomenclature follows BirdLife International (2013). The 'at sea' recording area for the Territory is based upon the approximate boundary of the BIOT Economic Exclusive Zone and is from 2°S to 11°S and 68°E to 76°E as used by Carr (2011a).

Plate 94. Tahiti Petrel.

Plate 95. Wilson's Storm-petrels.

Results

Tahiti Petrel *Pseudobulweria rostrata.* A single well-photographed individual of this extremely rare visitor to the north, central and western Indian Ocean flew past the BIOT Patrol Vessel (BPV) whilst it was supporting scientists investigating the submarine feature Sandes' Sea Mount at 07° 08' S, 72° 07' E on 23 Nov. 2012 (PC). (Capt. Neil Sandes is the Master of the BPV). Photographs of this vagrant from the Pacific Ocean were passed to NC/CA for confirmation of this bird's identification. This bird is certainly the first for BIOT and possibly the first confirmed (and photographed) record for the northern, central and western Indian Ocean. Tahiti Petrel has been sighted in Australian and eastern Indian Ocean waters (e.g. Dunlop *et al.*, 1988a; Dunlop *et al.*, 1988b; Cheshire, pers. comm.). Further west, Lambert (2004) had sightings of three presumed Tahiti Petrel in 1987 and another three in 1990 south of Mozambique; Van den Berg *et al.* (1991) sighted what was thought to be either a Tahiti or Atlantic (Schlegel's) Petrel *Pterodroma incerta* between Cape Comorin and the Maldive Ridge (08° 10' N, 76° 17' E - northern Indian Ocean); and Anderson (pers. comm.) had a possible sighting off Vaavu Atoll, Maldives on 05 April 2014. Onley and Scofield (2007) state that it is…. "Increasingly commonly recorded off Australia and in the tropical Indian Ocean, even in the west".

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii.* Records of Bulwer's Petrel came from the 2012 Pelagic Science Expedition (PC). On Sandes' Sea Mount 07° 08' S, 72° 07' E there were two birds on 21 Nov., four birds on 22 Nov. and single birds on 23 and 24 Nov. 2012. A further bird was noted on Ganges Bank 07° 21' S, 70° 56' E on 25 Nov. 2012 and a final bird was recorded off the rocky outlier, Coin du Mire, Peros Banhos Atoll 05° 26' S, 71° 53' E on 29 Nov. 2012. These birds were identified by size, storm-petrel-type flight, overall brown colour, bill shape and size and prominent pale bar along the greater coverts.

Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax.* A lone bird flew east to west some 50m in front of the bow of the BIOT Patrol Vessel Pacific Marlin on 01 Aug. 2014 at 06° 55' S, 72° 16' (PC). The overall darker colouration and more shearwater-like flight were immediately apparent and distinguished it from Bulwer's Petrel. There remains only one other record of this species in BIOT waters, another single bird recorded on 26 Jan. 1960 (Bourne, 1971).

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus.* During the 2012 Pelagic Science Expedition the following observations were made (PC): Sandes' Sea Mount, five 21 Nov., one 22 Nov., one 23 Nov. and 15 on 24 Nov. 2012 when chumming for sharks. Speaker's Bank 05° 03' S, 72° 16' E, one 26 Nov. 2012.

White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina.* A single bird was recorded in the vicinity of Speaker's Bank 05° 03' S, 72° 16' E on 26 Nov. 2012 (PC). In addition to the 1974 RNBWS record of this species used in Carr (2011a), the RNBWS World Database (2014) now contains two further records of single birds in BIOT waters on 07 Sep. 1959 at 08° S, 72° E and 07 Sep. 1964 at 03° S, 73° E.

Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae.* There are records of tentative sightings of this species from BIOT waters prior to 1971 (in Bourne, 1971), but no claims of further sightings have been published since then. The RNBWS World Database (2014) contains some 15 records of this species in the Indian Ocean; all to the east, north and west of BIOT. During the 2012 Pelagic Science Expedition the following observations, with several birds photographed, were made as follows (PC): Sandes' Sea Mount, one 21 Nov., five 22 Nov., seven 23 Nov. and 12 on 24 Nov. 2012. Speaker's Bank 05° 03' S, 72° 16'E, five 26 Nov. 2012. These are the minimum number of birds involved from 78 sightings of this IUCN Red-Listed Data Deficient species made over the twelve day expedition. Photographs of some of these birds were passed to NC and other Australian seabird specialists for confirmation of the identity. Size, distinctive upper-wing markings and deeply forked tail were deemed diagnostic of this species. These sightings are consistent with this species known post breeding dispersal, south across the Equator from the breeding islands off Japan, through the northern Papua New Guinea waters to the Timor Sea off north-west Australia and then west into the Indian Ocean, where it winters mostly in the equatorial belt around the Seychelles and west to Somalia and Kenya (BirdLife International, 2014).

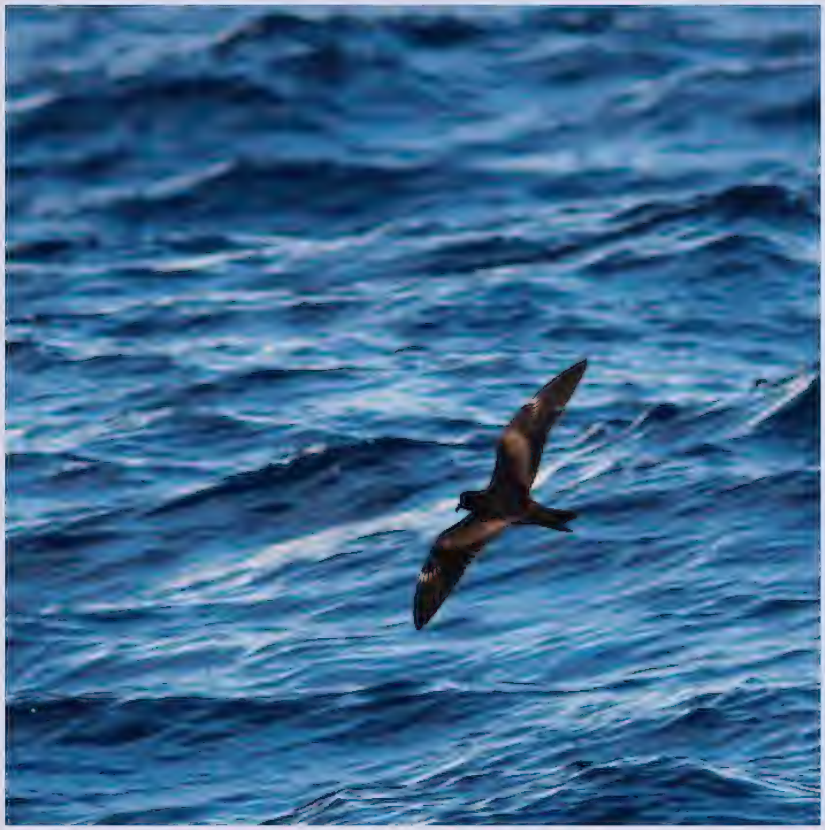

Plate 96. Matsudaira's Storm-petrel.

Plate 97. Flesh-footed Shearwater.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes.* Two new records exist (PC); one of three birds seen on a sea-watch off Diego Garcia on 14 Sep. 2011; the other of a loose flock of 60–80 well-photographed birds on 04 Aug. 2014 at 05° 48' S, 72° 03'. The RNBWS World Database (2014) does not hold any further records in BIOT waters and despite concerted sea-watching from both Diego Garcia and the BIOT Patrol Vessel through 2008–2014, this species remains rare or under-recorded. This lack of records is surprising considering the western Australian breeding population are trans-equatorial migrants to the Arabian Sea (Marchant & Higgins, 1990).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster.* This species has been declining throughout its breeding range in the Indian Ocean (Feare, 1978) and the Chagos Archipelago is now a major breeding stronghold. On the 2014 Science Expedition, a record count of 778 pairs (PC) were breeding on North Brother and Danger Island and a single bird was found nesting on Ile Longue, Peros Banhos, a new nesting island. Had the colony on Danger Island been synchronised with North Brother the count would have been higher. The Danger Island colony had just completed the main breeding period and only 38 nests were occupied, while up to 40 newly fledged birds were noted around the island.

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus.* Further records come from individual birds on Diego Garcia. The first was seen from 07–28 Jan. 2012; the second was noted on 01 Jan. 2013 (PC). This species is a vagrant to BIOT.

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx (Egretta) intermedia.* A single well-photographed bird found on Diego Garcia on 26 Aug. 2011 (reported in Sea Swallow 60) remained on the island until 18 Apr. 2012. The second record for BIOT is of a bird that turned up on Diego Garcia on 4 Oct. 2012. This was joined by another bird on 19 Oct. 2012. Five birds were found on the island on 1 Jan. 2013 and at least two were still there at the time regular counts on Diego Garcia ceased on 08 Jan. 2013 (PC).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Up to three birds were present on Diego Garcia from 14 Jun. 2011 until 8 Jan. 2013 (PC) when effective bird recording ceased. This species remains a rarity to BIOT.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Further records of individual birds on Diego Garcia exist from 12 Sep. and 4 Oct. 2011; 4 Jan., 11 Mar., 17 Mar., 24 Jul. and 29 Sep. 2012 (PC). It is possible that all these records relate to a long-staying individual. This species is a vagrant to BIOT.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*. Following the second Diego Garcia record on 15 Feb. 2011 (reported in Sea Swallow 60 (Carr, 2011b)), further records from the same island are 3–4 Jan., 9 Feb. and 13 Sep. 2012 (PC). This species is a vagrant to BIOT.

Osprey *Pandion halieatus*.A single further record and the third for the Territory is of another short-stay individual on Diego Garcia on 12 Dec. 2012 (PC).

European Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*. A single female-patterned bird glided over the Turtle Cove area of Diego Garcia on 20 Sep. 2012 mobbed by Common White Tern *Gygis alba* as a USA/UK team were conducting a bird census (PC/Risa Caneda/Scott Vogt). This well photographed bird was identified by NC. Remarkably a second bird, possibly the same individual was sighted over the same area on 22 Oct. 2012 (PC). These sightings constitute the first and second records for BIOT. Whilst this species has not been recorded yet from the Maldives (Anderson, 2011 and records therein), there are five accepted records from the Seychelles (SBRC, 2014).

Plate 98. Oriental Plover.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* The third record of this species was of a single bird on Diego Garcia on 05 Oct. 2011 (PC). Similar to the previous two records, it was found hunting over the airfield.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*. There are further records of this species being found in BIOT, all on Diego Garcia. Single birds were recorded on 06 and 12 Jan. 2012 and on 13, 14 and 23 Dec. 2012 (PC). It is thought these records relate to two individuals. This species is a sporadic visitor to BIOT and its occurrence in any year is likely to be influenced by bad weather in the northern Indian Ocean forcing it south during its migration period.

Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*. Disappointingly, this species has not returned to its former numbers in BIOT (see Carr, 2011a). There are four further records, all from Turtle Cove on Diego Garcia. Single birds were noted on 8 May 2011, 8 Apr. and 23 Dec. 2012 and two birds on 12 Feb. 2012 (PC).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*. There are a further 21 records from Diego Garcia of up to three birds between 21 Feb. 2011 and 1 Jan. 2013 (PC/Risa Caneda). This species is a very rare but annual overshooting migrant to BIOT.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultia*. A single bird was photographed at sea over the Ganges Bank 07° 21' S, 70° 56' E on 25 Nov. 2012 (PC). This species is deemed a common non-breeding northern hemisphere winter visitor to BIOT, with many birds remaining throughout the year (Carr, 2011a). This probable migrant bird some 90km from the nearest land mass is of interest but not exceptional.

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*. A well-photographed juvenile was found on a dry grassy area of Diego Garcia on 18 Sep. 2012 and was last seen on 14 Nov. 2012 (PC/Risa Caneda/Scott Vogt). This constitutes the first record for BIOT. This species has not yet been recorded in the Maldives (Anderson, 2011 and records therein), though to the west in the Seychelles there have been five confirmed records to date (SBRC, 2014).

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes.* There are three further records of this species . Single birds were found on Diego Garcia on 28 Jan., 10 Jun. and 24 Jul. 2012 (PC). This species remains a vagrant to BIOT.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus.* A lone bird was found on Diego Garcia on 14 Oct. 2012 (PC). This constitutes the third record for BIOT.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago.* Individual birds were recorded on 10 Jan. and 14 Nov. 2012. Two further birds were found on 13 Dec. 2012 (PC/Risa Caneda). This species is a rare, secretive but annual visitor to BIOT.

Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura.* There are a further 16 records, all from Diego Garcia with a maximum of seven birds on 16 Feb. 2011 (PC/Risa Caneda). This species appears to be an annual visitor in very small numbers.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax.* There are a further 13 records involving four or five birds, all from Diego Garcia and all falling in the northern hemisphere winter months (PC).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus.* Two birds were found on Diego Garcia on 5 Jan. 2012, and a singleton on 7 Jan. 2012 (PC). Another single bird was found on Diego Garcia on 22 Jan. 2013 (PC). These birds constitute the second and third records for this species in BIOT.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos.* There are further records concerning two birds, both on Diego Garcia. The first was found on 25 Oct. 2011 and was last seen on 3 Nov. 2011 (PC). The second bird was a short-staying individual located on 14 Oct. 2012 (PC). This species is a vagrant to BIOT.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminate.* There are a further eight records of this species, all from Diego Garcia, and they probably relate to two birds. The first bird was found on 8 Sep. 2011 and was last seen on 29 Sep. 2011 (PC). The second bird was first located on 4 Oct. 2012 and was last seen 8 Nov. 2012 (PC). This species is a vagrant to BIOT.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta.* Further records of this vagrant to BIOT are of single birds on Diego Garcia on 20 Sep. and 22 Oct. 2011, 26 Sep., 8 Oct. and 12 Dec. 2012 and of two birds on 27 Sep. 2012 (PC).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincol.* A single bird was present on Diego Garcia from 2 Oct. to 14 Nov. 2012 (PC). This is the second record for this species for BIOT.

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum.* Further records exist of this vagrant to BIOT, all from Diego Garcia: one, 26 Jan.–21 Feb. 2011; two, 21 Dec. 2011; one, 14 Oct. 2012 and two, 8–22 Jan. 2013 (PC).

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus.* This species' breeding phenology in BIOT is still not understood and therefore any statement concerning population dynamics must be treated with caution. 155,000 breeding pairs were recorded in the Territory in February 2012. Zero breeding pairs were recorded in February 2013. March 2014 saw 400 pairs breeding on two islands and there was evidence of mass desertion (c. 32,000 pairs) on Ile Parasol, Peros Banhos. There was evidence of a heavy avian tick infestation on Ile Parasol . Without knowing their breeding cycle or the periodicity of tick infestations it is difficult to interpret these results.

Plate 99. Sooty Tern chick with tick-infected foot.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger.* Sea Swallow 62 (Carr, 2013) gives details of the extraordinary occurrence of Black Terns in a Sooty Tern breeding colony on South Brother on 26 Jul. 2010. These birds were a remarkable photographed first for BIOT and possibly the first in the Indian Ocean. A single previous claim exists of this species: a lone bird of unstated age or plumage in the Egmont Islands on 01 Feb. 1975. Due to the lack of supporting details this record was treated with caution and placed in the non-verified category in the provisional 2011 checklist (Carr, 2011a and references therein).

Common Swift *Apus apus.* Further records for this species come from Diego Garcia and are of a single bird on 04 Oct. 2011, and two birds on the same date in 2012. This species is a very rare but seemingly annual overshooting migrant to BIOT.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica.* Further records are all from Diego Garcia. An individual bird was found on 30 Jan. 2012, and this was joined by a second on 6 Feb. These two birds were last noted on 9 Feb. Another individual was recorded on 14 Oct. 2012. This was joined by a second bird on 30

Plate 100. Black Terns in flight. © *PO L Keddings, USN*

Dec. 2012 and these were seen occasionally up to 30 Jan. 2013 (PC). This species is an annual overshooting migrant to BIOT.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia.* Three Sand Martin were found and (poorly) photographed at a sewage treatment works on Diego Garcia on 15 Oct. 2012 and were last seen on 19 Oct. 2012 (PC). These birds are the first confirmed records of this species in BIOT. Sand Martin has been expected as a vagrant to BIOT as it "has been regarded as a regular winter visitor and passage migrant to the Maldives" (Anderson, 2007 and references therein) and there are 32 accepted records from the Seychelles (SBRC, 2014).

House Crow *Corvus splendens*.The two resident House Crow on Diego Garcia (Carr, 2011a) continue to lead an enigmatic existence. There is a further single confirmed record of these invasive pests on 19 Sep. 2012. These birds are exhibiting unusual behaviour in that they appear to have taken up residence in the uninhabited forested northern tip of the eastern arm of Diego Garcia and never visit the inhabited western part of the island. Workers who occasionally have cause to visit that area say they have heard and seen crows up to 4km south of Barton Point (pers. comm.). House Crow is normally an obligate associate of man (e.g. Ryall and Meier, 2008) and why these two birds remain shy of human habitation is a mystery. It could be they are associating with the ships present in the Diego Garcia lagoon.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava.* Further to the four records up to 2011 (Carr, 2011a), the following additional records of juvenile birds are from Diego Garcia: single 25–26 Oct. 2011; single 2 Oct., single 22 Oct. and single 28 Oct. 2012. The Oct. 2012 records refer to different individuals.

Discussion

Since the last update to the BIOT bird check list (Carr, 2011b) five new species have been added: Tahiti Petrel, Matsudaira's Storm-petrel, European Honey-buzzard and Sand Martin. The fifth, Black Tern, has been added retrospectively after photographic evidence of its occurrence was unearthed (Carr, 2013). This brings the total number of species recorded in BIOT to 124.

The two new pelagic seabird records are a direct result of the increased effort by scientists to improve understanding of the use by organisms of the submarine features of the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA) - and are a tribute to long lenses and digital photography. They may also be indicative of a greater use of BIOT waters by seabirds than present records indicate, both as a feeding area and as a transit route across the Indian Ocean. Certainly further research in to the association of seabirds with submarine features in the MPA is warranted.

The details of the unexpected occurrence in BIOT of Black Terns in a Sooty Tern breeding colony in July 2010 are covered in Sea Swallow 62 (Carr, 2013), but there is an error on page 111 of that report. When describing tail fork depth for Black Tern, it should read "The birds in the photographs have a very deep fork depth" not, as written, shallow. This diagnostic feature is better illustrated in other photographs by PO Kedding USN taken at the time. With the exception of the tentative 1975 sighting mentioned in the species account above, no other published records of Black Terns occurring in the Indian Ocean have been located.

The two new land birds and the plethora of other bird records are a result of having ornithologists permanently based upon Diego Garcia. The detailed records deposited with the now defunct website www.worldbirds.org by Cdr Chris Moorey RN and by the author (both RNBWS members) together with others (CPO Janet Prushansky USN, Stacie Jackson, Risa Caneda and Ian Robinson - RSPB) between 2009 and 2013 are unprecedented in the ornithological history of the Chagos Archipelago. These records are in the public domain and are a permanent archive of the avifauna of BIOT during this period. They are also a tool for future researchers to compare trends with, something that has been desperately lacking in BIOT to date.

Finally, unquestionably, with further recording more new species will be found. Obvious candidates are Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Let us hope an RNBWS member will be the one reporting them!

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Capt. Neil Cheshire and Dr. Charles Anderson for their advice on bird identification and for their constructive comments on the draft of this article; to Capt. Stephen Chapman for help in retrieving seabird records from the RNBWS World Database; to my former work colleague Risa Caneda and visiting US scientist Scott Vogt for their company in the field; to Cdr. Chris Moorey RN for contributing so much to BIOT ornithology whilst he was the British Representative and for the hours we spent in the field and elsewhere together. Thanks too to all who contributed to the www.worldbirds.org website and finally, thanks to the Captains and crew of the *BPV Pacific Marlin* for their invaluable support to those of us lucky enough to have visited the northern atolls of the Chagos Archipelago.

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The RNBWS overseas area reps

by David Dobson

ARABIAN GULF

Commander Chris Moorey RN.
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I started bird-watching somewhat abruptly on 7 November 1973 when, having seen a particularly resplendent Bullfinch at close quarters, I decided that I needed to know what it was and bought myself an *Observer's Book of Birds*. Joining the RN a few years later in 1981 did nothing to diminish my interest in the subject and over the next 20 years the avian world helped to break up the monotony of many a long bridge watch.

During my seagoing career, I have been fortunate enough to enjoy deployments to most corners of the maritime world, and if I have any regret it is that I did not make more of those far-away port visits over the years, where I was focused on issues other than ornithology... so many missed opportunities!

That said, my subsequent and mainly shore-based career has provided an abundance of opportunity through overseas appointments, with 2 years in the Falkland Islands, (with frequent visits to Ascension Island), a year in Diego Garcia... and now, insh'allah, at least 3 years in Bahrain. In the Falklands I met those RNBWS stalwarts Mark Cutts and Steve Copsey, who showed me birds that I would not otherwise have discovered and with their unbounded enthusiasm re-ignited my interest in the Society. The year in Diego Garcia, working alongside RNBWS member and Chagos specialist Pete Carr was without doubt the birding highlight of my life so far, and as if living and working on Diego Garcia (described by leading environmentalists as the most pristine inhabited atoll in the world) were not enough, being paid to conduct regular patrols of 54 neighbouring uninhabited islands and islets was pure heaven. Now here I am in Bahrain, on a key migration route between Africa and Eurasia, and a place that is wonderfully rich in birdlife. I hope all birding enthusiasts who visit will get in touch with me.

AUSTRALIA

Captain Neil Cheshire MN.
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I have been interested in birds since my schooldays in NE Essex. I went to sea in 1958 as a navigating apprentice and joined RNBWS in 1960. At that time I was influenced by Bill Bourne's articles in Sea Swallow and his sometimes pithy comments on the contributions of myself and others to the Seabird Report. After world wide voyaging and several years on the North Atlantic run, including a year in Weather Ships, I joined the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand in 1970. During my time in New Zealand my seabird knowledge benefited from my friendship with Richard Sibson who was co-author of the NZ Field Guide and with Capt John Jenkins who was a member of RNBWS. The ships I was attached to traded around the NZ coast, trans-Tasman to Australia and to the islands of the SW Pacific. In 1980 I made a career move to Australia. In 1984 I was fortunate to be appointed master of the CSIRO research vessel *Franklin* and remained there until the ship was withdrawn from service in 2002. *Franklin* was the optimum berth for a seabird enthusiast, with voyages all around Australia, the SW Pacific and the Southern Ocean, usually in remote areas away from normal shipping routes. From 2003 until my retirement in 2008 I sailed mostly on a long range vessel of the Australian Customs and Border Service and was favoured with several visits to Heard Island, Kerguelen, Crozet Islands and Antarctica. I now live at Encounter Bay, about 60 miles south of Adelaide, South Australia, and would be pleased to provide visiting RNBWS members with information and contacts.

BLACK SEA

Gabriel Banica.
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I am a biologist, and have been the RNBWS representative for the Black Sea area for several years. This past year year I have been working on two projects, one on biodiversity in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania

(the Jiu Gorges National Park) and the other on a river reserve in the western part of Romania (the Mures Floodplain National Park). I hope to write an article on this work for Sea Swallow next year, and also hope that RNBWS members who visit this area will get in contact with me.

CYPRUS

Colin Richardson.
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We came to live in Cyprus in 2003, from Dubai, where I was a Council Member of OSME (and still a big supporter). Middle East birds get into your blood, and I immediately joined BirdLife Cyprus when it was formed in 2003 out of the former Cyprus Ornithological Societies, joining the committee as their new Bird Recorder in 2004, a position I held until 2013. As well as compiling over 50,000 records a year, and writing the monthly systematic list of sightings for the society newsletter, the job involved compiling and editing the annual bird report. I now chair the Cyprus Bird Rarities Committee. I was Bird Recorder in the UAE for years, produced the annual Emirates Bird Report from 1986 to 2001, and with all the information available was able to produce a couple of books including 'The Birds of the United Arab Emirates' in 1990.

It was in Dubai that I first met Bill (WRP) Bourne, for his ship visited Dubai several times. As Ship's Surgeon on the Armilla Patrol in the late 1980s he helped me understand the confusing array of gulls in the Gulf, and it was in those days that he kindly introduced me to the RNBWS.

FALKLAND ISLANDS

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I first came to the Falkland Islands in 1959 to establish an experimental farm. At close of the five year project I decided to remain in the islands and since then have pursued a free-lance career as a naturalist/conservationist, wildlife artist and stamp designer.

In those years I have travelled extensively around the islands, particularly to remote offshore locations, reporting on the wealth of wildlife found and initiating a call for measures to protect these areas for the future. The old *HMS Protector* was a great help, and it was with Lieutenant David Dobson, now President of RNBWS and editor of Sea Swallow, that I first visited Beauchêne Island, most remote of the outer islands, and the subject of my article in last year's Sea Swallow. If my memory serves me correctly it was through this association with *HMS Protector* that I became the RNBWS Falklands representative.

Plate 101. Ian Strange (FI Rep) being attacked by a Skua, Beauchêne Island, December 1964. © *David Dobson*

I was the author of the reference book 'The Falkland Islands', published in 1972 and since then have produced eight further works on the islands, plus a number of scientific papers and articles for international magazines. I am also a Crown Agent stamp designer, and several of my designs have appeared on stamps of the Falkland Islands and other territories.

In 1972 I bought New Island and established it as a wildlife reserve where research into all aspects of natural history and conservation on New Island South is carried out. To ensure the island remained a reserve in perpetuity I formed the New Island Conservation Trust. This is a UK registered Charity and as I write we have an international team of nine scientists on the reserve. It remains a prime visiting area for HM Ships and they are always welcome. Since 1982 I have also been an adviser on environmental matters to the UK Ministry of Defence and the British Forces in the Falkland Islands.

GIBRALTAR

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I joined the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) at the age of eight and am now section head of the Strait of Gibraltar Bird Observatory, having previously headed the Invertebrate Section. I am an avid birdwatcher and my life-long interest in birds branched into other facets of natural history, especially insects and plants. This led to my becoming Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, which is involved in the conservation of Gibraltar's plants and has a strong working relationship with GONHS.

I have a degree in Zoology, a Masters in Biodiversity & Conservation and a PhD in the ecology of migratory and resident songbirds. I am also a member of a number of statutory bodies in Gibraltar, one of which is the Nature Conservancy Council, and I represent GONHS on Gibraltar's Development & Planning Commission.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been born in Gibraltar, for I can imagine few better places in which to develop an interest in birds. As is well known, Gibraltar is a migratory hotspot and the possibility of monitoring migrant birds, be they raptors, passerines or seabirds, offers extremely exciting opportunities for the birder. Gibraltar also offers access to the ornithological bonanza of the habitats of Southern Spain, as well as the chance to visit Morocco and experience its fantastic avifauna. There can be few places in Europe where birding is so fulfilling. Final message: RNBWS members are very welcome here!

HONG KONG

Geoff Welch.
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I am currently Secretary of the Records Committee of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and an editor of their Annual Report.

I have lived in the Far East since 1991, in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and now since 1996 in Hong Kong. I retired from my job as Far East Regional Director for a UK multinational in 1999 and I have been concentrating on bird watching since the beginning of 2006, mainly on a study of land and seabird migration on the island of Po Toi in the far southeast of Hong Kong. This involves spending three days in every week of the migration seasons (March to May and September to November), living on the island with only ten other residents.

Hong Kong is perhaps best known for the WWF wader and waterbird sanctuary of Mai Po Marshes but it is also an excellent location for land and seabird migration with a list of more than 500 species. It is moreover a very good starting point for visits to China and other countries of South East Asia.

INDIA

Praveen J.
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I am really pleased to become the new RNBWS representative in India.

I live in Bangalore, where I work for CISCO. Birding is my hobby, and I specialise in pelagic work. I therefore use the RNBWS database regularly to look at past records when planning our pelagic expeditions, and I send all our sighting reports to the Society.

For the last two years we have been covering the off-shore waters of southwest India - something which not many people have done in the past - and I was invited to edit an issue

of the Indian Birds journal, focusing on pelagic birds and covering most of our results. This gave pelagic bird watching much visibility, and as a result pelagic trips off the East coast too are now taking place.

I am a regular contributor to indo-pacific-seabirds e-groups, moderated by Colin Poole.

Apart from pelagic birding, I moderate an e-group for SW India called Kerala Birder (with over 600 members) and conduct bird surveys regularly in the Western Ghat mountains of Kerala. In 2011 I co-authored a book with three other bird-watchers/ornithologists on the status and distribution of the birds of Kerala (http://www.nhbs.com/birds_of_kerala_tefno_163407.html)

MADEIRA

Dr Frank Zino.
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I was born in Madeira where I am now based, but went to school in UK, originally travelling in Sunderland flying boats and then on the Union Castle ships going to and from South Africa. I studied medicine at the Royal London Hospital, qualifying in 1966, and I worked in London until 1979 when I returned to Madeira, and where I now work as a GP and Occupational Health physician.

Life in Madeira was always very much in the open and we sailed between the islands of the archipelago and had a very close contact with nature. In 1963 there was a multidisciplinary expedition to the Selvagem Islands on which I was invited and my father and I met Christian Jouanin and Francis Roux from the Paris Museum of Natural History. It was they who really awakened my interest in birds, an interest which continues to this day.

Over the years ships of the Royal Navy have used Madeira for R&R stopovers and so we met many people from the ships, including many keen birders, and were pleased to be able to give guidance on where to see birds of interest. Thus my involvement with the RNBWS. The Navy were also of enormous help with our studies of *Pterodroma feae deserta,* Deserta Petrel as they landed us on top of Bugio in their helicopters, first Wasps and then Lynx. This was a great improvement on clambering up dangerous cliffs with heavy loads and also allowed us to store water for future trips on foot.

With limited time at my disposal I dedicate most of my birding efforts to seabirds, though we do watch the island's endemics and the yearly vagrants during migrations, and go out on pelagic trips with Madeira Wind Birds. We have been working together with the Museu de História Natural do Funchal (MMF) and the Parque Natural da Madeira on Zino's Petrel, *Pterodroma madeira.* This study started in 1969 with the rediscovery of this bird by my father and is ongoing. We have also been working with *Pterodroma feae deserta,* Deserta's Petrel and this study too continues. I visit the Selvagem Islands about 4 times a year with two long stays. There we have study areas of nesting *C.d. borealis,* Cory's Shearwater, where we have been monitoring the population since the early 70s.

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Together with the MMF we have used satellite tags (PTTs) on Cory's and obtained very interesting tracks. These are expensive and we are now using dataloggers to track our birds, with the problem that we have to catch them a year later! This has been very successful so far and we have good distribution charts for Zino's Petrel, Deserta´s Petrel, Bulwer's Petrel and Baroli's Shearwater. This year we are concentrating on the Madeira Storm Petrel, *Oceanodroma castro,* and the White-faced Storm Petrel, *Pelagodroma marina,* and it will be fascinating to learn of their distribution at sea during breeding and migration.

These results could be of interest to RNBWS members at sea (in the Atlantic) as it will give an indication of what you may expect to see and where. Whilst sadly it is now very rare to have a Royal Navy visit, any member is always welcome to make contact. We have even tried to set up an expedition to the Selvagens in the past! It can still be done.

NAPLES

Mark Walters.
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I settled in Naples in the 1980s, working for the British Council, with birding just a passing interest until I bought a modern telescope, met David Dobson in 1991 and soon thereafter joined the RNBWS. Now, alongside the monitoring of breeding and wintering species in the region of Campania (around Naples) I also do pelagic bird counts several times a month from one of the many

estuaries along Italy's western coastline. I am an active member of two local ornithological associations, and also representative for Birdingpal (*www.birdingpal.org*) in southern Italy, which brings me into regular contact with birders and ornithologists visiting the region. For the last few years I have been studying the flora and fauna of ancient Pompeii, and considering broader aspects of sustainability and environmental impact in ancient Italy. This interest has taken me as a speaker both to Washington DC and the Getty Villa in Malibu, and hopefully will generate a publication in the near future.

However, field work in certain parts of the south of Italy can be fairly challenging. There is significant hunting pressure from September to January, and illegal hunting and trapping much of the rest of the year, so we try to work closely with the local forestry officers and police forces, alerting them when necessary to breaches of environmental laws. Over here, some of the best birds are in the roughest areas, and I would always advise any visiting members or anyone relocating to the area to get in touch with me, both for directions and for advice on precautions to take. That said, there are very rich pickings to be had and lots of discoveries still to be made, especially in the interior. Ornithologically speaking the south of Italy is still very much uncharted territory.

SEYCHELLES

Adrian Skerrett.
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I was born far from the sea in Stoke-on-Trent in UK but our family spent weekends caravanning on the North Wales coast, where I developed a passion for birds from an early age. It was the lure of seeing rare island endemic birds and bustling seabird colonies that made me think it might be nice to work in Seychelles for a couple of years. One thing led to another and I got deeply involved in nature conservation in the country so those two years turned into considerably more. When I arrived in the country there was no accurate checklist of birds and a lot of disagreement among birdwatchers over which migratory species were turning up. I founded the Seychelles Bird Records Committee in 1992 together with other

Plate 102. Seychelles. Lesser Moorhen. © *Tony Jupiter*

Plate 103. Seychelles. Red Knot. © *Aurelia Duhec*

birders and we authenticate all interesting sightings in Seychelles. Every year we add one or two new species to the country list, which can be downloaded at the SBRC website. I am also a member of BirdLife's Rare Bird Club, country representative for the African Bird Club and Chairman of the Island Conservation Society, which has conservation centres on five islands including Aride, the most important seabird island in the region. I have authored or co-authored a number of books including the Helm Field Guide *Birds of Seychelles*.

Piracy in the region plus the relative proximity of the Middle East mean that we usually get about two RN ship visits a year.

USA

Dr Robert Wolk.
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I received my ornithological training at Cornell University and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and after graduate school spent ten years teaching undergraduate and graduate students. The rest of my career was at natural history museums, and I eventually retired from the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh. My interests have always centred on coastal birds, *Laridae* in general, terns and skimmers (*Rhyncops*) in particular, so I was pleased to find it possible to join the RNWS because at the time it was the only organisation I knew that was devoted to oceanic birds.

It has been both an honour and a privelege to serve RNBWS as its USA representative, answering the occasional question or birding with visiting members, as I had the pleasure of doing with Chris Patrick and Mark Cutts many years ago. But time has gone by, and having now entered my eighties, I feel I ought to pass on my responsibilities to a younger person. Any volunteers?

David Dobson
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Plate 104. Seabird Group Conference, Oxford. © *S Chapman*

The Seabird Group conference

by Stephen Chapman

The 12th International Seabird Group Conference was held at Merton College, University of Oxford, on 21–23 March 2014, convened by Professor Tim Guilford of the Oxford Navigation Group. Whilst it did not have a particular overall focus, it touched on much to concern and interest both the casual and the enthusiast birder alike. President David Dobson and Vice Chairman (MN) Stephen Chapman attended.

Results of research came from well beyond the UK: Germany, Ireland, Poland, Greece, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, France, Japan, Sweden, Iceland and USA. Life histories, foraging, demography and change, migration, navigation and movement, and conservation and impacts were among the topics presented. A number items in particular took our attention.

Persistent toxic pollutants in food taken by albatrosses

Alice Carravieri from the Centre d'Etudes Biologiques de Chizé, France presented a paper explaining that in Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* persistent organic pollutants and mercury reach remote locations through long range atmospheric transport and deposition. Top predators such as seabirds absorb significant quantities of biomagnifying pollutants via food intake. Several intrinsic and extrinsic factors may drive inter individual variation in seabird contamination, but this has rarely been studied. Alice's team measured 10 organo-chlorine pesticides, seven polychlorinated biphenyls and mercury in blood of 169 Wanderers from the Crozet Islands, Indian Ocean.

The albatrosses carried important loads of contaminants, with strong individual differences. Feeding ecology was the main factor, explaining variation between individuals. In particular, feeding habitat had a strong effect on contaminant levels, with individuals feeding in warmer subtropical waters carrying higher loads of mercury, but lower loads of pesticides, than those feeding in colder sub-Antarctic waters. This work shows the critical role of individual foraging specialisation in contaminant loads in the Wandering Albatross.

Demographic indicators for monitoring seabird populations

Aonghais Cook of the BTO explained the importance of demographic indicators for monitoring seabird populations. With increasing human pressures on biodiversity, effective indicators need to be specific and sensitive to pressures in the ecosystem concerned, simple enough to be interpreted by non-experts and straightforward enough to facilitate routine monitoring.

Seabirds are under increasing pressure as a result of human activities and environmental variation. Traditionally, indicators have been based on abundance at breeding colonies, but as many species delay sexual maturity these may fail to capture the ecological complexity of the system concerned.

Cook's team constructed two indicators of the state of nine species breeding along the UK coast of the North Sea: seabird abundance at breeding colonies, and seabird breeding failure rates. These were significantly correlated, but the abundance indicator typically lagged the breeding failure indicator by two to three years. They then considered a third indicator, comparing Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa Tridactyla* breeding success to levels expected, given the environmental conditions. The abundance indicator also lagged this by three years, but indications were that changes may have been apparent earlier than when considering just breeding failure.

They found that focusing on demographic parameters and correcting for underlying environmental conditions meant potentially important population level changes could be detected at an earlier stage rather than by focusing on abundance alone.

The Tystie and the Ice Sea: Black Guillemots respond to a melting Arctic Ocean

George Divoky from Seattle showed very graphically how Mandt's Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle mandtii* is one of the few seabirds adapted to exploiting the fish and invertebrates of the cryopelagic ecosystem associated with Arctic sea ice. A long term study of Black Guillemots in northern Alaska found that from 1975 to 2002 parent guillemots relied almost exclusively on Arctic Cod, *Boreogadus saida*, when feeding nestlings, the primary fish species associated with Arctic sea ice. Since 2003, with summer ice retreat and sea surface temperature increased, a decrease in Arctic Cod availability has caused guillemots to rely on lower quality prey, such as Sculpin and other nearshore demersals, with concurrent decreases in nestling quality and survival.

In addition to the reduction of prey near the breeding colony, sea ice reduction has also decreased guillemot breeding success because of the northward expansion of a nest competitor, the Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*, and forcing the southern displacement of a nest predator, the Polar Bear *Ursus maritimus*. Overwinter survival of adult guillemots has not declined in the last four decades, indicating that decadal changes in the thickness and annual formation of ice have not affected prey availability during the nonbreeding period.

Comparative albatross demography: species-specific responses to changing climate and fishing pressure

Deborah Pardo of British Antarctic Survey, Natural Environment Research Council, and her team used data from 30 years of study of on three species breeding at South Georgia: the Wandering, Grey-headed *Thalassarche chrysostoma* and Black-browed Albatrosses *Thalassarche melanophris*. Climatic and fisheries covariates were collated for the foraging zones used during the breeding and non-breeding seasons by each species. Three main questions were addressed: are the trends in survival, return, breeding, and success probabilities associated with climatic covariates? Do long line and trawl fisheries have an effect on survival and breeding success? Do the species differ in their responses to changes in fisheries and climate? At present it is work in progress and we await to see what light it may shed on the troubles facing albatross populations.

Movements and at-sea activity of Boyd's Shearwaters

Research by the University of Barcelona, Spain was presented by Zuzana Zajková. She noted that tracking studies increasingly focus on small seabirds, but those breeding in tropical and subtropical regions are still little studied. Boyd's Shearwaters *Puffinus boydi*, endemic to the Cape Verde Islands, are thought to disperse over the central Atlantic but ship sightings are scarce and unreliable - a fact confirmed by RNBWS. The project team used geolocation-immersion loggers to track 32 birds from 2007 to 2012, while salt-water immersion data provided information on at-sea activity. After breeding, birds migrated 1,000 to 2,600 km to the west from April to June, remaining in the central Atlantic Ocean for 115 days on average until August to October. Prenuptial migration lasted for seven days on average.

Plate 105. Bill Bourne presentation - shows Mike Harris, Russ Wynn and Bill. © *S Chapman*

The wintering area seems to be concentrated in the seas of 5°–15°N and 30°–40°W, an oligotrophic region, rather than one of nutrient rich upwelling. The population is thought to be in the region of 2,000 birds.

Annual variation in movements of the critically endangered Balearic Shearwater

Rhiannon Meier of the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton presented results of a team project that used different tracking systems in order to improve understanding of the at-sea movements and behaviour of the Balearic Shearwater. It addressed the fundamental questions relating to when, how and why individuals move through the marine environment as they do. For the Balearic Shearwater, a pelagic *procellariiform* currently facing threats both at breeding colonies and at sea, an improved understanding of the species' movement ecology is urgently required. To address this, the team undertook a study based upon a range of biologging systems (GPS loggers, geolocators, time-depth recorders) and stable isotopes.

Initial results from 2010–13 reveal three main foraging strategies employed during the incubation phase, and highlight variation in foraging movements between years. Birds were found to exhibit strong diurnal patterns of behaviour, and to be highly efficient at orienting themselves towards their destination from distances of hundreds of kilometres.

Dr WRP Bourne given Life Time Achievement Award

It was a great pleasure to see Dr Bill Bourne at the conference. Bill has been a long term supporter and expert adviser to RNBWS, and was appointed Adviser Emeritus by RNBWS in 2012.

Dr Bourne was also the driving force behind the creation of a Seabird Group in the UK in the 1960s. Indeed he was elected as the first Honorary Secretary and held this position until 1978. At the conference Bill was presented with a delightful painting of a Black-bellied Storm-petrel, by Dr Russell Wynn, present chairman of the Seabird Group (and the current RNBWS Adviser on seabirds). The presentation of this life time achievement award was to recognise Bill's outstanding contribution to seabird research, for campaigning and conservation arguments which he was always able to back with knowledge. In his introduction, Mike Harris noted Bill's publication of 176 technical papers including 40 in the international journal ***Nature***. He also noted that Bill was often a thorn in the flesh of the establishment but emphasised that he always worked for the greater good and not for self.

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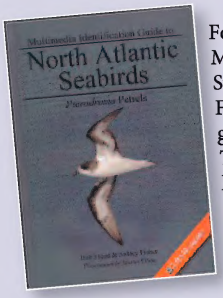
Book Review

Multimedia Identification Guide to North Atlantic Seabirds: Pterodroma Petrels **by Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher, illustrations by Martin Elliott. Published by Pelagic Birds and Multimedia Identification Guides in association with www.scillypelagics.com. 2013. Hardback 316pp plus 2 DVDs. £42.95 post free in UK.**



Following their very successful Multimedia Guide to N Atlantic Storm-petrels Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher have now produced an ID guide to N Atlantic pterodromas. The guide consists of a 316 pp hardback book plus two integrated DVDs. Pterodroma petrels covered are Trindade, Kermadec, Atlantic, Great-winged, Bermuda, Black-capped, Soft-plumaged, Zino's and the two sub-species of Fea's, 'Cape Verde' and 'Desertas'. Kermadec Petrel is included on the basis of two controversial records and the contention by Imber (2004) that the species breeds on Trindade Island, S Atlantic and occurs in the N Atlantic. The authors refute Imber's argument in considerable detail. Great-winged Petrel is included on the basis of an unconfirmed UK report and possible confusion with dark morph Trindade Petrel.

The first part of the book gives an overview of the species covered , ID techniques, moult (or molt as the authors prefer), structure, flight behaviour, tables of relative body lengths and wingspans of the species and the ratio of wingspan to total body length of each species. Detailed species accounts follow and include distribution maps showing core range and maximal range. Ranges of the rarer species are based on geolocator data and show some surprising long distance dispersals from their breeding islands. Confusion groups and confusion pairs are discussed in detail, supplemented with excellent comparative illustrations by Martin Elliott. All species are profusely illustrated with over 300 high quality colour images. The final section of the book provides a bullet point summary of essential identification details. The appendices include a section on the now extinct Jamaica Petrel *Pterodroma caribbaea* and a brief explanation of the Humphrey-Parkes moult and plumage system and terminology used in the book. There are interesting insets that include the histories of 'Saving the Bermuda Petrel' and 'Saving the Zino's Petrel'.

The two DVDs each contain around 200 video clips and still images with a combined running time of 130 minutes and coverage of all species. Each clip is numbered and annotated with species, location and date, and a useful timeline for each DVD repeating this information is given in the book. The narration by Bob Flood is clear and informative and demonstrates his acute observation skills. Anyone who has followed the fast soaring, swooping and erratic flight of a pterodroma from the deck of a vessel rolling and pitching in a seaway appreciates the difficulties of obtaining good video of these 'winged runners'. About 90% of the video was obtained by the authors, a remarkable feat. DVD1 includes visits to the remote breeding islands and DVD2 has documentaries on 'Saving the Bermuda Petrel' and 'Saving the Zino's Petrel'. These have significant interviews with David Wingate and Jeremy Madeiros in Bermuda and Frank Zino in Madeira.

The book brims over with the authors' enthusiasm and there is zealous attention to detail. There is repetition in the various sections of the book but this is acceptable in the context of ID proficiency of these fast moving subjects. It could be argued that the book would have benefited from the services of a professional editor; however I enjoyed its idiosyncratic nature, the minutiae and unexpected gems such as the detailed discussions of the 2009 'Varanger' Petrel and the Madeiran 'snowy-winged petrel'. The book and DVD set are good value and will be enjoyed by all seabird devotees.

Reference

Imber, M.J. 2004. Kermadec Petrels (*Pterodroma neglecta*) at Ilha da Trindade, South Atlantic Ocean and in the North Atlantic. *Notornis* 51:33–40.

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Cory's Shearwater

Audouin's Gull

White-tailed Tropicbird

White Tern

Great Frigatebird

Northern Gannet

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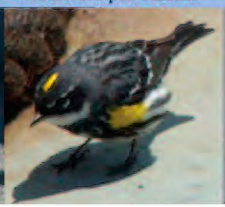
White Wagtail

Melodious Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler



Black Redstart

Scop's Owl

Plate 106. Eurasian Spoonbills on board *HMS Echo*, Arabian Sea. © *P Boak*